MIKE SHAYNE
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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MURDER GO ROUND
The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel by BRETT HALLIDAY

JUNK MAN
A Vivid New Novelet by BEN SATTERFIELD

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

FEB. 1979
VOL. 43, NO. 2

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

MURDER TO COME

by BRETT HALLIDAY

When Tim Rourke's lovely niece gets involved in a bizarre slaying, it is up to Shayne to unmask the murderer before the girl comes to harm . . . 4 to 45

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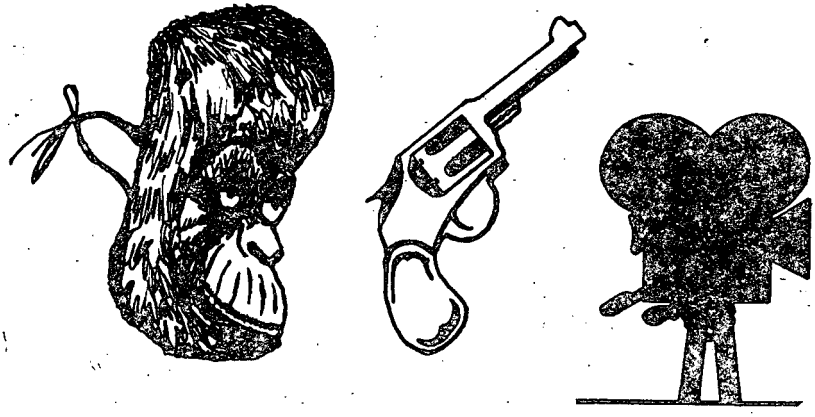
MURDER TO COME



by BRETT HALLIDAY

The Film Clip Showed Garland Perry's Murder—but the Corpse Was Still Alive. It Was up to Shayne to Find His "Killer"

WHEN MIKE SHAYNE got back from lunch that day, Lucy Hamilton, smiled and said, "There's a most unusual client in your office, Michael."

Shayne flicked his fingers to show he had heard and went on in. It had not been a good day and he was in no mood for unusual clients.

The man who sat behind his desk was Tim Rourke, his best friend over the years, newspaperman, top reporter for the Miami *Daily News*. There was the usual—Tim's features, lined face with deep-socketed eyes, bony shoulders, scarecrow figure. Yet for a moment Shayne stopped.

He was used to Tim in a suit that looked as if it had been slept in for several days. Dress was hardly Tim's long suit. But this day he was attired in a well tailored vested banker's grey with stitched lapels, a striped shirt and a lustre-fabric tie.

Shayne blinked, said, "You got a bonus."

"I *did?*" said Tim in surprise. He swung his thin legs down from the edge of Shayne's desk. "Funny the front office didn't tell me." Then, "Oh—*this?* Well—

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UH—my cleaner was getting a little upset."

"You told me you had a niece coming to town," said Shayne. "I take it she arrived."

"Suzy arrived . . . I guess you're pretty busy."

Still a little taken aback by Tim's sartorial splendor, Shayne eased into the chair Tim had vacated.

"Slow today, Tim. What's up?"

"Mike, I really hate to bother you—uh, my niece, Suzy, works for a TV documentary outfit. Did I mention that?"

"Gaylord something or other," said Shayne.

"Garland Perry. A small New York outfit." Tim frowned and lit a cigaret. "The kid has been nuts about journalism since grade school. She always thought I was — you know — *special.*"

"A family hero."

"Yeah. Hotshot reporter." Tim squirmed in his new suit. "Something like that."

Shayne could sympathize with Tim's embarrassment. Tim had shown him a picture of Suzy Rourke when he mentioned the visit. A high school picture that showed bright eyes with coke-bottle glasses, the typical thin Rourke face and stringy hair.

Shayne could imagine his old friend's embarrassment at having to squire a skinny, awkward young relative around Miami, putting up with the chatter of an over-eager youngster on her first assignment. She was out of high school now, with some college, but Shayne knew she'd be the type that gushed. Tim Rourke, the concise, salty reporter, could not tolerate gushing.

"She's an electronic journalist," Tim said sadly. Shayne nodded. He knew Tim's prejudice against TV news and documentaries.

"She's in trouble?" Shayne encouraged Tim.

"Sort of. Her boss is. He's received a film clip showing himself being killed. Her boss, Garland Perry."

"But he's not dead?"

"Not yet anyway."

Shayne felt a spike of excitement. "Where's Perry, where's Suzy — and where is this film?"

"In a penthouse in a hotel over in Miami Beach. TV documentary producers live well. I know you're busy and you've got more important things to do —"

"Let's go," said Shayne.

As they rose in the elevator in the big, expensive hotel, Tim sighed, said, "When you live in a place like Miami, you can figure on friends or relatives droping in."

"Interrupting the flow," Shayne agreed. "Changing routines." The suit was okay and Tim was okay but they did not make music together. In fact, a tourist couple on the elevator looked at Tim askance. The elevator stopped at their floor. As they vanished, their voices floated back

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to the two friends:

"Miami gangster," said the wife.

Tim actually blushed and Shayne, from sympathy, said nothing. They reached their floor. Crossing the lobby of the penthouse Tim added, "Besides the film of the murder, Suzy says one of their researchers is missing. A character named Fletcher."

Suzy Rourke, Shayne decided, was making Tim pay dearly for being her childhood hero, even if he had never sought the role. As Tim punched the doorbell, almost hidden in filigreed wood, he told Shayne, "This niece of mine is a kind of surprise. I hope you won't mind."

"Relatives," said Shayne, "are relatives."

A woman opened the door of the penthouse suite. A young woman. She was about five-and-a-half feet high. Suzy Rourke's stringy hair had been transformed into a long, flowing mane of black hair that gleamed with a healthy lustre. The thin face of the high school picture had filled out into a delicate beauty with lovely planes of cheek bones and a sensitive mouth. The hazel eyes were soft, feminine.

There was no sign of glasses, coke bottle or otherwise. She wore a crushed velvet pants suit that suggested a fabulous bosom and a figure that fully belonged on TV, but not in the news. Perhaps as a luscious girl detective or stewardess or sitcom doll. In a word, she was gorgeous.

"Uh — this is Suzy Rourke," said Tim. "Suzy—Mike Shayne."

Shayne found himself shaking a warm, soft hand as he stared into melting eyes. Any man, even an uncle, he thought, who had to escort such a creature about Miami should indeed buy himself a new suit.

"Tim thinks your TV unit might be having some trouble," Shayne said.

"Only disaster," Suzy replied in an excitingly throaty voice. There was no gushing. "Somebody's already probably killed our research man and left behind a warning they want to kill my producer. He's in the bathroom, swallowing tranquilizers. I don't honestly think any of us will get out of Miami alive."

"Now, Suzy," said Tim. "Exaggeration."

"This is *sinister,*" said Suzy.

"Can we see this sinister film?" asked Shayne.

Suzy set up the apparatus in the lush penthouse living room. While she did so, Garland Perry emerged from the bathroom, tall, elegant and looking very much the show-business figure he was. An older man with a bald head and an eagle look, his fringe hair obviously dyed. Also, Shayne suspected, a light use of cosmetics elsewhere. He was dressed elegantly. In his presence, Tim's suit looked almost casual. With the tantalizing Suzy

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and the glamorous TV producer, Shayne felt the sense of unreality he always felt around show business types.

"Absolutely incredible," said Perry. "Beyond belief! I sent my best research man, Fletcher, to Miami to launch our next documentary. So he vanishes, leaving this ghastly clip behind."

Suzy darkened the lights and rolled the clip. The scene was obviously this very same penthouse, with the long brocade-covered sofa, the thick green rug, the huge lamps. The film was silent. It opened with Perry at ease in a chair, reading a script. An unheard door buzzer sent him to the door. He escorted a young man into the suite. The lit lamps showed it was night.

His visitor was tall, tanned, well-built and jaunty. Shayne thought he recognized him as the son of a local millionaire named Webster, or some name close to it.

"Richardson Weber," said Perry. "Everybody calls him 'Clip'."

Suzy gave them the further information that Clip Weber was a young pilot who had given up his dangerous foreign adventures for a local operation.

"He calls it Gambling Intentional," said Suzy. "That's the real subject of our documentary."

In the film, Garland Perry greeted the young man and they shared a drink. Suddenly, Perry jumped up and began to make angry gestures. The young man rose to shout back. Perry turned away angrily, presenting his back to the young man—who drew a revolver and fired. Perry jerked in agony as two bullet holes appeared in his back. The next shot was the most gruesome of all, a closeup of Perry's contorted, pain-wracked face. Next came a shot of Perry's body on the carpet. The screen went white as the clip ended.

As the lights came up, there was a thin film of sweat on Perry's brow.

"You can imagine, Shayne, that the film gives me nightmares."

Shayne understood. Meanwhile, Suzy had rewound the clip and showed it to the detective. "Seamless," she said. "No cuts."

"How did you get into the film?" Shayne asked Perry.

"That, Shayne," said Perry, "is the most bizarre part of it. I don't know. I haven't been in Miami for years. I sent Fletcher down. I talked to him once by phone. Nothing unusual. When I arrive—no Fletcher—but this film. I want you to find him, Shayne."

"Now, Mr. Perry," protested Tim, "Shayne's a friend of mine. We're just asking his opinion."

Suzy had noticed Shayne's bristle at the peremptory tone of her boss. "Please, Mr. Shayne—you'll help us?" she begged.

"What about young Weber in the film?" asked Shayne. "Is he also missing?"

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Perry smiled grimly. "No, Shayne. I have a date with him here tomorrow afternoon to explain all this."

"I'll be here," said Shayne.

Before he and Tim could leave the suite, Suzy insisted on planting a wet kiss on her uncle's cheek, which made Tim blush. She pressed Shayne's hand warmly, standing so close he could feel her body heat.

"Mr. Shayne, you're the first good news I've had in Miami," she said. "Besides Uncle Tim, that is."

Shayne left the place feeling that Perry would do well to give Tim's niece her head in making films. She knew how to warm up her subjects.

Tim asked how Shayne figured it.

"Spooky," said Shayne. "Perry's lying, of course. He had to be in Miami, in that room, to be filmed."

"Why would he lie?"

"Maybe he was talking to somebody else when Fletcher made that film. He doesn't want anybody to know who."

"*Ah,*" said Tim. "So Fletcher masked the film and reshot the part with young Weber."

"Could be. At no time did Perry or this Clip Weber shake hands or come close to each other. Anyway, I'll be there when Garland Perry and Clip Weber meet."

"Mike, I'm sorry about my niece."

Shayne laughed. "That's not a niece to be sorry about, Tim. It should cure both of us from taking high school pictures too seriously."

II

JAUNTY, that was the word for Clip Weber, Shayne thought, as he, Tim, Garland and Suzy greeted the young man on the following day in the same hotel suite. He looked larger than in the film clip, but it was the same man. He had a bright and disarming smile. Yet the detective had a weird feeling to see Garland Perry rise and go to the door to admit the young man, just as he had in the film. This time, they shook hands, though distantly.

Weber seemed unconcerned, even amused about the film. "I look forward to seeing this film you're murdered in," he told Perry. "I seldom kill in hotel rooms. Mostly, I did mine in Viet Nam and certain African wars, where I flew."

Garland's sour smile told Shayne the producer disliked Weber's breeziness. The young man watched the film clip with bright eyes.

"Marvelous photography," he said. "Total fake. I've never been in this hotel suite in my life."

That makes two liars, thought Shayne.

An angered Garland Perry

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cross-questioned Clip, but the young man flatly denied being in the room, ever meeting Garland or touching the revolver. He did say he had talked to Fletcher, the advance camera man and research man. Only on the phone.

"My uncle Chadwick wasn't keen to have his Gambling Intentional put on film," said Clip. "On the other hand, why not?" He smiled.

"Gambling Intentional is a new technique to cure habitual gamblers," Suzy said. "The story has lots of good angles. The daring war pilot returning to help his local neighbors. His uncle is quite colorful, too."

"All of this," said Perry hotly, "doesn't explain the trick you're playing on me, young man."

"Maybe you're trying to lay a bad trip on me," said Clip. His eyes glittered. "People don't do that to me."

Perry turned red and his eyes also glared. "I'm not accustomed to accusations, Weber."

"Why should I take crap from you?" asked Clip. "*You* make films—*I* don't."

"Maybe Mr. Shayne should ask the questions," suggested Tim.

"I think it might be better if we took Clip downstairs for a drink," Shayne said smoothly.

"We might get some truth that way," suggested Garland. "While this young man's sober, all we get is lies."

Clip Weber jumped to his feet and moved forward, quiet and deadly. Shayne was ahead of him. Years of experience had trained the detective to recognize and handle violence before it went too far. He caught Clip's arms.

"We won't have that," Shayne said quietly.

Clip's eyes flamed as he broke loose from Shayne. He turned on the detective, smooth and cool, trying a chop, a warrior who had faced violence many times.

Shayne was his equal. Almost lazily, he moved a shoulder and slid in to take Clip Weber in an armlock. Weber had underestimated Shayne. Struggling, but pinioned, he burst out, "This bastard—"

"We'll leave," said Shayne. He walked Weber towards the door. "It's Perry's room. The film bothers him. We'll discuss it downstairs."

The others were frozen, caught by surprise at this sudden physical action. Garland Perry looked ashen—he apparently hadn't realized Weber's quick capacity for violence. Certainly he was no match for Weber. Tim was on his feet, while Suzy stared, open-mouthed.

"Yes. Get him out of here. See what you can do with him, Shayne," said Perry. The producer retreated to the wet bar, tapping his sweating forehead with a handkerchief, mannered and stylish even in this stress.

Tim and Suzy trooped out with

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Shayne and his captive. In the foyer, Shayne felt Clip's body relax.

"You can let me go, Mr. Shayne. I wouldn't hit the bastard. I'd hate to ruin his makeup."

"It isn't exactly makeup," Suzy said loyally. "Garland just feels he has to project an image."

They all followed young Weber into the elevator. Clip punched the *down* button—and kept moving. He slipped past Shayne, Suzy and Tim and out just as the doors closed. Shayne started to follow but Suzy shifted at the wrong moment and the redhead wound up with an armful of woman, warm and soft. The doors closed, the elevator dropped, leaving Clip Weber out-side, still in the penthouse lobby.

"*Damn!*," said Shayne. He immediately slapped some buttons, but the elevator dropped a couple of floors before it stopped. Shayne firmly stood Suzy to one side and burst out of the door, heading for the stairwell. Tim and Suzy followed. Shayne pounded up the stairwell in agile stride. In the lobby of the pethouse, he saw the double doors of Perry's suite ajar. He pushed through at top speed.

Garland Perry lay on the green rug, two bullet holes in his back—just as in the film clip. This time, there was no fake about it, and the prophecy of the celluloid sequence was fulfilled. Garland Perry was very, very dead.

Suzy and Tim burst into the room behind Shayne. "*Service elevator,*" said Shayne after a quick look at the body and the other rooms. He cut through the kitchen to the unadorned back hall. The door of the service elevator was closing. Shayne caught only a glimpse of his quarry.

Clip stood inside the elevator, revolver in his hand. Shayne had no doubt it was the same gun shown in the film. Weber gave a quick wave as the door closed. Shayne put forth his best effort but, by the time he reached the lobby, there was no trace of the young pilot warrior . . .

The police had come and gone and the body removed. The reporters had moved in and out, including Tim, who melted into their number. He had already called in a preliminary to his city desk and then departed to write the full account.

That left Shayne and Suzy alone in the penthouse. The girl showed her Rourke mettle. She was white-faced and shaken, but she also had journalistic blood, like Tim. She gave the police a clear interview and held herself together. Yet Shayne knew she was dying inside.

"How do you feel?"

"I'll be all right, Mr. Shayne." Her smile looked weak.

"You can stay with my secretary, Lucy Hamilton, tonight if you want."

She smiled her thanks. With

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Perry dead and Fletcher missing she was on her own in Miami. They were the New York crew of the small firm. Perry always used local technicians at the site of a story. Suzy was scriptwriter, director and voice-over narrator if needed.

"I've also been known to fetch coffee." She smiled wanly.

Shayne felt sorry for the girl. It was her first big job and she had seen her boss killed almost before her eyes. True, she had Uncle Tim, but he had his job and his long reporter's years made him less than ideal around someone who had not seen much violence.

Suzy followed Shayne about the penthouse, puzzled. "Looking for something, Mr. Shayne?"

"Suzy, can you fire a gun?"

"Yes. Only not at people. I couldn't kill like that terrible young man." She was younger than Weber but made him sound infantile.

Shayne took his gun out. "I want you to get some pillows together." He handed her his gun, showed her how it worked. "When you're ready to do the experiment, I'll tell you what to do."

When she had gathered the pillows and studied the gun, Shayne pointed to a small light above the double-door entrance to the penthouse. "That light goes on when the elevator leaves the floor below to come up here and stays on until the doors close and it starts down again. That tells the penthouse occupant he's about to have visitors, or when they've left. I want you to wait until the light goes out and you've counted to forty. Then fire into the pillows."

She nodded and he went through the routine as before. Out of the penthouse. Wait for the elevator, go inside, doors close. He punched the same buttons and rushed up the stairwell as he had done a few hours before. He burst through the doors and saw the girl with the gun in her hand, the holes in the pillows. He smelled the cordite.

"My ears still ring," she grimaced.

"I know. I heard the shots when I climbed the stairwell."

"What does that mean."

"It means your terrible young man may not have shot your boss after all. Those shots went off while we were still in the elevator, and Clip still in the lobby."

"What?"

"He wasn't armed, Suzy. I wrestled with him. I'd have known. And disarmed him. He didn't have time, even if he'd hidden the gun beforehand. And Perry would not have turned his back on that wild young man bursting into the room. Perry would surely have swung around to get the bullets in the chest."

"Which means?"

"Someone else hid in the bedroom while we talked out here. Someone who knew about the film

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clip and wanted to make it come true. Maybe Fletcher. Or this uncle from Gambling Intentional. It could be that young Weber rushed back to the penthouse to *prevent* a murder, not *commit* one."

"I'm glad," said Suzy. "He did look nice in his safari suit."

Shayne had to admit, with a smile, that this was one point about Clip Weber he had missed.

III

SHAYNE FOUND HIMSELF officially on the case that same night. A white-haired, sad-faced woman and her rotund, quiet husband hired him in the name of Clip Weber. Mr. and Mrs. Weber, Clip's parents, were millionaires, owners of a large furniture factory and lumber interests throughout the South. It was apparent they had never understood their son, who gave up a secure job behind a desk to fly airplanes in combat.

"We couldn't do anything for him, Mr. Shayne," said the weeping mother. "We even set up a trust fund for him—ten million dollars if he ever needed it—but he's never touched it. Always earned his own way."

Apparently the young man had been influenced by his uncle Chadwick, a poor relation given to gambling and other less orthodox interests.

"Clip liked Uncle Chadwick," said Mr. Weber. "We never fought it. We thought we might be a little stuffy for the young man. But now it looks as if we were wrong. He's a fugitive from justice—"

"—accused of murder," said the horrified woman.

The Webers had heard that Shayne was the best private detective in Miami and wanted him to take the case and clear their son.

"I'll work for you," said Shayne. "I don't think he shot Perry, but I only go after the truth. If it turns out he did, that's what you've bought."

"We understand, Mr. Shayne. We know he didn't do it."

Suzy Rourke sat alone in the small funeral chapel. Up front, Garland Perry rested quietly and peacefully in his casket. He looked to Shayne pretty much as he had in life—dignified, eagle-like, slightly unreal with cosmetic touches.

Shayne slid into a pew beside Suzy. "Tim sent me to find you."

Suzy's eyes were moist. "I had to arrange this, Mr. Shayne. His accountant called me from New York. He's the executor of the will. I was to have the body cremated and the ashes sent back to New York.

"The accountant is all he's got. *Imagine that!* No family, no ceremony, no *nothing!* Just send the ashes back. So I thought I'd at least give him a coffin and a visitation, even if nobody came. No-

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body's come."

"I'm sorry. But of course nobody down here knew him."

She squeezed his hand. "He wasn't a generous boss. Or friendly. A lot of people didn't like him but he gave me my first real job, my chance. So I thought I could at least sit with him." The beautiful girl turned her head into Shayne's shoulder and closed her eyes.

"To have you come and sit with him is quite a lot," said Shayne. "Tim would have come but he's still on the story. I'll take you home to Lucy."

"The accountant said I could spend some money to find his killer. Maybe I could hire *you?*"

"Not necessary, Suzy. I'm already on the case for Clip's parents."

She looked grateful. "I hope I picked the right suit for him. Do you think he'd look better in blue?"

"The brown is fine, Suzy," said Shayne. He went on out to sign the visitor's book. As he glanced through the door of the chapel, Suzy unaware that she was watched screwed up her face in anger and shook her fist. It startled Shayne. Was the gesture against Perry's killer, or against Perry himself?

The small private plane eased down out of the sky more than a hundred miles from Miami. Below the passengers saw a rural airfield with a large hangar of grey corrugated metal at one end. Both the field and the hangar buzzed with life, with cars parking, with people moving into the building.

Uncle Chadwick, Clip's relative and founder of Gambling Intentional, sat opposite Shayne, Tim and Suzy, who wore a stylish brown corduroy pants suit.

"*Zut!* You *have* it!" said the old man with sparkling eyes. He gestured down towards the boil of tiny cars and people. "The regular weekly meeting of my Gambling Intentional." There was something French, or phoney French, about this poor relation of the Weber family. He was thin, tall and well turned out in bright plaids. His face sported a small neat mustache and goatee below a jaunty beret covering thin silver hair. A character. Another character, thought Shayne.

The old man was at least seventy and bore his years well. On the plane ride up from the city he explained that he had wasted his life gambling—"man's greatest joy and deepest misery," he called it. Toting up his gains and losses he regretted his misspent years. So he had launched his club to ease the pain of other gamblers.

"I gather the lost brethren from the city and transport 'em hither—isolated from temptation in this deserted airfield. *Alors,* I let them gamble away the whole day for a fee, including the trip, food and

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drink. But the money is play money—only the excitement is real. At the day's end, they return, sated, to their dull lives. Hopefully they can hold out for another week, another trip here. My fee is large—but far less than the weekly losses most gamblers suffer."

Uncle Chadwick went on to explain that usually his nephew, Clip, flew the crowd in, using a large 707. But the death of Perry and Clip's disappearance had put a halt to that. Clip was a fugitive from justice now.

"Very sad." said Chadwick. "*Oui*, it may end my operation. *And* your film documentary, young lady."

Suzy could only nod sadly. Shayne's ears popped as the small plane came down for a landing. Suzy gripped the arms of her seat, Tim chewed gum. The Cessna was quite a comedown from a 747, thought Shayne.

They landed and the old man led the way. "Clip is innocent. Someday he may come back and our work resume. Because a gambler's life is *rien*, you understand. Absolute *rien!*"

Chadwick's nurse-companion, a heavy set Germanic type, followed the reformed gambler out of the plane. His name was Irving and he had spoken not at all on the trip up.

A huge black met Chadwick on the ground. He looked big enough and mean enough to handle any tackle in professional football. Chadwick told Shayne's group that he had to talk to his manager and would give them a tour later.

The plane's pilot identified the black. "Name of Traynor—and mean, that one," he said. "A defector from the dictatorship of Uganda. He might've worked for the State Research Bureau." Shayne understood that this was the Gestapo of Idi Amin's dictatorship.

"Clip must have brought him in," murmured Suzy. "Clip's last over-seas flying job was for Uganda. They use lots of American pilots."

The trio found a holiday atmosphere on the ground in a crowd that Tim estimated at about three hundred. Despite the run down condition of the isolated airfield, people acted as if it were Disney World. They thronged happily about picnic tables set up in the great hall of the hangar, enjoying every type of gambling in this miniature Las Vegas. Voices rang cheerfully, chips clinked, wheels spun, lights dazzled, and there was money in every hand—play money.

Tim caught the spirit at once. "What's your game, Mike? Uh—I mean what's our game plan today."

Shayne smiled. "Gamble—and get names and addresses. As many as you can, Tim. And don't spend all your winnings on booze."

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Tim shoved off happily into the crowd. Suzy clung to Shayne, pressing her soft body to his, arm through his arm.

"I wanted to take some pictures, Mr. Shayne. If it's impressive enough I might get the company accountant in New York to let me make my film anyway, without Clip."

Gutsy girl, he thought. *A Rourke through and through.*

She went on, "Uncle Chadwick said people might not like their pictures taken, but I could if they agreed. Will you help?"

Shayne told her he wanted to look around first. He spotted a man wearing a silver lame shirt. He pointed the man out to Suzy. Gently he disengaged himself from her grasp.

"You could start with that one," he said.

Her eyes lighted. "That," she said, "could be my opening shot." She darted off as Shayne laughed. If it glittered, glowed or flowed and you could wear it, Suzy was turned on.

Since they landed, Shayne had been preoccupied with the peculiar appearance of the hangar. Its rear quarter was completely closed off. Inside, there was a blank wall, completely cutting off a sizable area. Large enough for a two-story apartment—for a couple of them. It rose above Chadwick's kitchen and cafeteria that served food, plenty of it, and drink, plenty of that, including wine and beer.

There were three doors in the partition wall. Two of them were restrooms, but the third was blank. Shayne eased himself in that direction. At that moment Uncle Chadwick appeared out of nowhere, looked around, and pulled out a key. He gestured to his nurse-companion, the stocky German, and opened the door to go through, followed by the other. Office? Hide-out apartment? Interesting, because it was too much space for both put together.

A small fat man who bounced on his feet when he walked appeared next outside the door. Apparently he had had at least one too many, for he swayed as he moved. He knocked loudly on the door. When no one appeared, he knocked again, louder. Some people at a nearby dice table glanced up and the man smiled and waved.

Like a sinister shadow, Traynor, Chadwick's floor manager, slid out of the crowd, towering above the smaller man. They argued, the small man gesturing at the door that Chadwick had gone through. Traynor kept shaking his head. Suddenly, the small man darted under Traynor's arm and began to beat on the door again. The big black grabbed the slightly drunken one and walked him away from the door. He walked the man to the men's room, one door down.

Shayne moved to follow but the target door opened again and the nurse-companion came out, as if to check on the knocking. He stood

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there for a moment, grimly, in front of the door, glaring right and left. What caught Shayne's special attention was the gun in the man's belt, revealed when his jacket swayed as he tugged up his trousers.

Nobody was supposed to go in there, that was for sure. Traynor came out of the men's room alone and slipped back unobtrusively into the crowd. As Shayne started for the restroom, the small man who had argued with Traynor came out. He no longer looked drunk or happy. He held a handkerchief to his lip and Shayne saw it was red with blood.

Obviously, no one was supposed to go in there.

Tim appeared at Shayne's shoulder. "I've already lost fifty dollars and got four names. But they won't help much. All first-timers, attracted by the news stories on Perry's death."

"There's one that should help," said Shayne. He pointed to the man with the swollen lip. "See if you can get the identity of that one. Take some time with him. It could be important."

Tim nodded. "Right. You know, I'm glad Suzy came to town. This is the first time we've done field work together in too long."

"Go, tiger!" Shayne laughed.

Shayne slid into the food line and got a ham-and-cheese sandwich and coffee so he could continue to watch the suspect door without being obvious. The meat and cheese were thick, the bread good. The coffee was superb. Uncle Chadwick really traveled first-class.

Chadwick's nurse had left the door and gone into the crowd to talk to someone. Munching on his sandwich, Shayne moved out of the chow line—and froze.

The man was talking to Suzy. There was no missing that brown corduroy suit—nor the cute behind as she crossed to the door with the big man. She glanced around nervously but didn't see Shayne. The big man went through the door and Suzy followed him.

Well now, Shayne thought as he eased towards the door. Chadwick was in there. Suzy was in there. The nurse-companion was in there. There was probably room for one more. He took out his key shims and picked a likely one. He glanced around to see if Traynor was in sight, but didn't see the man. The third and fifth shim worked and Shayne opened the door and was inside in twenty seconds.

Should've taken fifteen, the big redhead thought.

It seemed to him that he had stepped out of the noisy colorful world of mundane activity into a catacombs. It was dim, and it was cool. Instead of rooms, there were tunnels—narrow walkways between towering stacks of gunny sacks loaded on pallets.

The stacks rose clear to the ceiling. When he brought out his

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pencil flash and used it he saw that this was a two-story structure, with a temporary wooden floor above. He was surrounded by a powerful, heady odor that was unmistakable.

Coffee! Bag after huge bag of coffee beans. There was no confusing their aroma.

The corridor he had entered led ahead into darkness. Other corridors intersected as the pallets made a complex labyrinth. There was no one in front of him nor in any of the nearby intersections. He heard voices, faintly, up ahead.

Shayne moved cautiously, letting his eyes grow used to the darkness. Evidently Chadwick's office lay ahead, because the voices grew louder, but he could not yet distinguish words. The stacks of coffee bags inhibited sound.

He stumbled—and froze. The voices ahead halted and he waited. The way Traynor had treated the small man and the gun in the belt of the companion had convinced Shayne that it would be useless to ask Chadwick about this place openly.

The voice resumed. Shayne saw that he had stumbled on a bottom step of a wooden stairway leading up to the second floor or level. The wood, in his flash, looked quite new—as did the ceiling. The work on this coffee storage room had been done recently.

Shayne thought for a moment, then took out a penknife and cut into a bag. He used small plastic bags from the inside pocket of his coat to take a couple of samples. More than once, these plastic evidence bags had served him well. Then he went quietly up the stairs, agile as a tiger.

At the top he found more pallets, rising to the ceiling, the corrugated real roof of the hangar this time. More dim corridors and intersections, but no sound of voices. The coffee smell was fainter up here, or else his nostrils had gotten used to it.

He was about to take another sample when he crossed an intersection and saw a door—a lighted door of frosted glass. He moved towards it, still hearing no sound. He stumbled again, this time over something soft, right in the middle of the floor. Something that didn't belong there.

He picked it up and felt the characteristic touch of corduroy. He put his flash on it. A brown corduroy lady's jacket. He gave a sharp intake of breath and his big hand shot towards the doorknob. If Suzy were in trouble . . .

His hand stopped, short of the knob. Somehow, he sensed that Suzy was not in trouble. Somehow, he knew he did not want to go through that door. She had gone through it voluntarily. He felt a surge of disappointment. The shape and pattern of the case had changed for him, as he stood there, holding Suzy's discarded

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jacket, still warm from her lush body. He stood there, thinking for long moments, then retreated to the stairs.

His luck had run out. Traynor stood right at the bottom. Eyes now used to the dark, Shayne could see the legs of other men clustered there. The redhead stepped quickly back stumbled over something and sat down silently. A bag of coffee beans had fallen drunkenly against its pallet. Voices floated up to him from below.

"I can't find your private cop, Shayne," said Traynor. His voice sounded delicate and soft. A tongue not used to English.

"The jerk is probably nosing through the whole goddam place," said a harsh voice. Very American, New York, East Side—that of the nurse-companion.

"Irving, you must not ruffle yourself. We must float. There's always trouble in this business, *n'est-ce pas?*" Chadwick sounded light and untroubled.

"I'll look upstairs," said Traynor, and the other feet clattered off.

Shayne heard the scrape of Traynor's feet coming up the stairs. He thought about bean-bagging the black man and decided it was okay. Traynor had given the drunk a fat lip, which was unfair, considering the small man's size and condition. The redhead grunted, lifting the bag but he had tremendous strength when he wanted to use it. He flipped the bag down the stairwell with a mighty heave.

"*Yorkkkkkk!*" There was a muffled clatter as Traynor and the bag melted back down the stairs. Shayne skipped down lightly, over the man still entangled with the bag and on down the corridor and out the door. It closed behind him on a muffled scuffling of curses.

Back in the hangar, his luck had quickly returned after only a brief recess. Neither Chadwick nor Irving saw him emerge . . .

Shortly after that, Uncle Chadwick made his speech. He clambered on top of a table with a surprising agility for a man of seventy and got the attention of the entire hall by the simple expedient of firing his revolver at the roof. The room quieted and every eye focussed on the jaunty leader of Gambling Intentional.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Uncle Chadwick, "I fear I have to make a very sad announcement. Today will be the last meeting of Gambling Intentional for some time. *Mes amis,* this distresses me as much as it does you, maybe more.

"I have tried so hard to give you the happy times while you break those bad habits, but we've lost our beloved Clip, and gained too much publicity. *Vraiment.* Our gambling habits are not something we want generally known, so I must regretfully terminate. Enjoy

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yourselves, struggle hard with the monkey on the back, but for now it must be *au revoir.*"

There were groans and then loud applause for Uncle Chadwick, who was practically lifted down from the table as well-wishers surged forward.

"Sort of like a church," grinned Tim, who had found Shayne. "Anyway, he's a popular guru. I found that out. I also got the info on the guy with the clipped lip."

"Good!" said Shayne. "Chadwick's smart to fold."

Tim moved on ahead and Shayne felt a soft hand dig into his biceps.

"That's the end of my documentary," said Suzy. She was without her jacket, wearing only a blouse.

"You look different."

"I lost my jacket somewhere. I must've left it at one of the tables," she said.

"Is this it?" said Shayne, producing the item.

Her dark eyes looked panicked and then she blushed. "Where did you find it?"

"In a dark place that leads me to ask questions, Suzy."

IV

AFTER THE SMALL plane had deposited them safely again in Miami, Tim drew Shayne aside.

"Uh—Mike, I've got a date tonight. I'd rather Suzy didn't meet her, didn't know. Suzy's so straight and innocent, and me being her uncle and all. You understand how it is. So if you could take Suzy off my hands . . ."

"I've been meaning to have a talk with her, Tim. You go ahead." Shayne was familiar with Tim's extra-curricular activities with various blondes, brunettes and redheads. Especially blondes.

"Thanks, old buddy." Tim was gone like a shot.

Suzy looked puzzled as Tim departed and moved reluctantly when Shayne guided her to his Buick. She had expected to have dinner with her uncle and Shayne and perhaps Lucy. They had already had a couple of happy evenings.

"Is Tim working? Do we eat now?"

"Tim has to meet someone important and we don't eat now," said Shayne grimly. He pushed the girl into the car. "You wait here."

When he called Lucy on the pay phone she told him he had one important call. Weber's parents had phoned to say they'd received a postcard from the West Coast. It was unsigned and in code but they were pretty sure it was from Clip, probably in San Francisco. He often used a code.

"Should we tell Will Gentry?" asked his secretary, referring to Shayne's close friend, Miami's Chief of Police.

"I'd rather not just now." Shayne knew that there was a fugitive warrant out on Clip.

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"We're not absolutely sure it's from him. Also, a postcard mailing from a distant city can be rigged. Thank the Webers and sit tight on it."

Back in his car Shayne drove grimly towards the outskirts of Miami.

"Where are we going?" Suzy asked.

"We're going back to Gambling Intentional," said Shayne.

For the first few miles, Suzy squirmed and fussed with her hair and chattered about their day at the airfield. Shayne noted that she hadn't protested the hundred-mile drive but that her chatter got increasingly close to the hysterical.

They had gone more than twenty miles before she broke. "All right, Mr. Shayne. You can stop the car."

Shayne pulled off the road and stopped. Suzy began to cry. Shayne lit a cigarette and waited patiently while she let it all out. After she had simmered down, he said, "Who—Clip or Fletcher?"

"I met him in New York," said Suzy. She swallowed against the end of her tears. "We had a couple of dates. It wasn't anything real heavy but he was a flyer who'd seen danger and things. I thought it would make a great TV documentary, this Florida thing, but I knew Mr. Perry would not like it if he knew I'd dated Clip. He'd give the story to someone else."

"What's the rest of it?"

She told him she thought the film clip was made by Clip and Fletcher with Clip playing Fletcher. It was to scare Perry off the story, that was all. She hadn't expected anything like murder. But it wasn't Clip, as Shayne knew. Or Fletcher. Fletcher, she thought, had just gone off on one of his periodic drunks at a strategic time. She thought it was more likely the horrible Ugandan secret service man or the male nurse that loved to show off his gun.

"Clip or Mr. Chadwick could never kill, Mr. Shayne."

"So Clip's hiding out at the hangar," said Shayne. "Upstairs in the loft. When we get there, all you have to do is go upstairs and tell him to come down to the car and we'll take him back to town to explain everything."

Suzy drew her breath in, in horror. "We're really *going* there?"

"We really are."

"But it's dark, late."

"I expect we'll make it all right," said Shayne breezily. He started the car engine.

"*Wait!*" She struggled with her jacket and it came off. "Mr. Shayne I—I—" The two top buttons of her blouse were undone. Soft eyes gleamed at him in the darkness. She slid her warm body against his. There was no question about it—Suzy was one of the most beautiful girls he had ever seen.

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"Mr. Shayne . . . Mike. You *like* me, don't you?" Her lips gleamed. Her breathing was soft and excited.

"I like almost everyone except people who lie, steal and murder," he said evenly. He could not deny he had a slight pulse rise.

She took his big hand and placed it squarely on her breast. A lush breast. There was only the thin blouse because Suzy was not the sort who wore bras. It was, thought Shayne, exquisite and excruciating.

There was her soft, excited breathing and silence in the car.

"When you're done," said Shayne, "we'll get on down the road."

They had gone quite a way when Suzy suddenly burst out laughing. "I don't get refused often, Mike."

"After all, you're Tim's niece," he said. He was annoyed with the girl and yet oddly pleased. She, like Tim Rourke, was a long way from bloodless.

"There's that." She retreated to her side of the seat. But she was tense again when they reached the airfield.

The scene was far different from earlier in the day. The field was open, deserted, desolate. The hangar loomed at them as a forbidding dark shape, blacker than the blackness of night. When they got close to the building they saw a single car, pulled into the shadows.

"It looks like your friend is home."

"Mike, this is very awkward."

"Consider how much more it is for Garland Perry tonight. Go get Clip."

She got out of the car and stood by the driver's side for a moment as if reluctant to leave him. He had already cut the lights but even in the dark he was intensely aware of her fragrant, soft-breathing presence.

"Mike, I like you a lot. You turn me on."

"I like you, too, Suzy."

"I didn't have sex up in that room today. I want you to know that."

"You're over twenty-one," said Shayne. "That part is none of my business."

She turned and walked off in the dark with a proud toss of her long, black hair. That one, he thought, was going to break many hearts before she got old and gray.

After a moment, he followed her, after pulling his gun from its accustomed place in the glove compartment. She found her way into the hangar easily. He wondered if she had a key. He followed her into the inky blackness. Ahead, a tiny light bobbed. She carried a flash in her small purse. He continued to track her, gun ready. Clip was quick, violent and wasn't going to like the second visit of the day from Suzy.

Clip was also tricky. Shayne was

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sure now that the postcard from the West Coast was a fake. Shayne had known fliers and the way they zipped about the country. Clip was the kind to have flown to the coast, mailed a postcard, had a couple of drinks with buddies out there and returned the same day.

By the time Suzy reached the warehouse section, Shayne was in the middle of the big gambling area, threading through the now empty picnic tables.

Something was wrong. A tiny sound, a movement. Shayne crouched down immediately, silent, waiting. Suzy was gone into the loft now. A minute passed. Two minutes. Nothing. Five minutes. Then Shayne heard the sounds of Suzy's return. The door into the warehouse section opened and two indistinct figures emerged, arguing.

"No detectives," said a man's voice.

"You've got to—" said Suzy.

"I can still collect if we can avoid that frigging flyer—"

"—talk to Shayne," Suzy insisted.

By this time, they had passed Shayne and gone on toward the big exit. The fact that fascinated Shayne was the voice of the man. It was not a voice he had ever heard. Therefore the man was not Clip Weber. So it had to be Fletcher, by Shayne's reckoning—the missing research-and-camera man who had made the film clip. Excellent! Shayne wanted to talk to Fletcher much more than to Clip Weber at this point. The film clip was the centerpiece of the whole case.

The action came then. With a blinding flash the large, overhead lights of the hangar went on, flooding the whole place. Shayne's eyes jumped to the wall in a quick scan. A grotesque figure stood by the light switch, the weirdest sight he had seen in many a case. The man was tall and wore a fancy plaid overcoat tossed across his shoulders. The face was covered with a gorilla mask, one of the ugliest Shayne had ever seen.

Suzy and Fletcher had frozen, turning to see who had put on the lights. There was a dramatic pause—the couple frozen, Shayne crouching, the spooky figure tall and menacing. The gorilla-masked man raised a gun and fired twice at Fletcher and Suzy. Fletcher roared, Suzy screamed.

"My *God,* I'm *shot!*" Fletcher cried out in panic.

Shayne fired at the gorilla man just as the attacker snapped off the lights again. In the rush of darkness, one of Shayne's bullets struck the metal tubing of the electric light conduit, making brilliant sparks fly.

Suzy and Fletcher stumbled on to the exit, Fletcher cursing, Suzy moaning. Shayne couldn't tell if the girl was hit, but he didn't think so. Her voice sounded choked by fear, not pain. Shayne started toward the opposite door

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of the warehouse section, sensing that the would-be killer was headed in that direction.

He was hampered by the picnic tables, the other was not. The warehouse door closed. It was over in seconds—the lights-the shots, the couple fleeing out the front—the masked man out the rear.

Shayne made his decision, reversed his chase and took off after Suzy and Fletcher. He wanted the research man very much. Outside once more in the dark night, he discovered that Fletcher had not been seriously injured. The man had taken off in the other car Shayne and Suzy had seen before. Shayne hit the Buick and took off after them, tires squealing.

The man was a good driver, but Shayne was better. He hit the straightaway fairly close behind them and smiled faintly. It would be an easy capture. There was no traffic, nothing to hold the two cars back as they streaked through the soft velvet blackness. Shayne settled down to ride Fletcher's tail. It might be better to grab him near some buildings where there might be a pay phone.

The chase turned out to be short. They had gone less than a mile when suddenly Shayne saw the twin taillights of the other car hurtle back on him. He had to stand on his brakes.

As he cut speed and slid up to Fletch's car, the door on the passenger side of that vehicle flew open and a figure tumbled out, as if pushed. With horror, Shayne recognized the flash of a brown corduroy suit in his headlights. Having slowed to eject Suzy, Fletcher gunned his car and sped off.

Shayne stopped. He wanted Fletcher but he couldn't risk leaving the girl alone, perhaps injured, out here in nowhere. Suzy sat, dazed, at the side of the road, her suit torn, a streak of blood on her cheek. Shayne tested her and found she could move. No broken bones or deep injuries. At least Fletcher had slowed down.

"My God!" moaned Suzy. "He threw me out. *Fletch threw me out!*"

V

MANY MILES further down the road, seeing that Suzy had calmed, Shayne asked if she wanted to talk. She sighed. "It was Fletcher I saw today, not Clip. That was Clip in the mask. It had to be Clip. Clip tried to kill us!"

"Maybe you'd better put it together for me," said Shayne. "How do you say it in the TV business? From the top."

Suzy began to talk. It was an account not unfamiliar to the private detective. A young, inexperienced girl getting a job with a cold and demanding boss. Fletcher, the experienced man protecting her, and teaching her his skills. Suzy's gratitude.

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"I guess you know I dig older men, Mike," Suzy said.

"The film, Suzy, Fletcher's disappearance."

It came out of the covert feud between Fletcher and his boss, Perry. Underpaid and overworked by Perry, Fletcher was looking for a chance to make Perry sweat—and pick up some extra money for himself.

"I think it's even more than that, Mike. Fletch won't talk about it but there was also trouble between Garland Perry and Fletch over a woman. It could've been Fletch's wife. That's what I think—he's divorced."

Gambling Intentional offered a perfect opportunity for Fletcher. As soon as Fletcher discovered the Miami people did not want the TV show to be made he planned the fake film. The first part was easy. Before each story Perry always interviewed the principals in his hotel room, with his advance man making a secret film.

"It was Garland's hidden persuader if the subject gave him trouble later," said Suzy.

This time, the adept Fletcher masked out the interview with Uncle Chadwick and took no sound. He ended up with footage of Perry alone on one half of the film. Then he and Clip shot the second half with Clip on the scene.

"So Perry did lie about being in Miami before."

"Yes. He couldn't let the word get out about those unauthorized sneak films he made before a project."

Clip had lied about his part, as Shayne had thought at the time. The rest was easy sailing for the gifted Fletcher. The supposed shot in the back, using explosive charges attached to the clothing of the back of the man who stood in for Perry, wearing a jacket like his.

The insertion of a still shot of Perry himself showing off at some party—Perry would imitate a Dracula when he had a load on. Another shot of the stand-in on the floor, face down, dead. Then Clip hid Fletcher at the hangar.

"Fletcher called me and warned me to let Clip take the lead," said Suzy. "I was mad at Garland then. He had just docked me for being off sick. I thought it was a kind of heavy-handed joke, but I owed a lot to Fletch."

"Then you got trapped with Tim bringing me in," said Shayne.

Suzy nodded. The thing got rather serious but she had to do what Fletch told her—trust Clip. So she wasn't surprised when Clip, next day in the elevator, shoved her into Shayne and went back to the suite.

Suzy had not expected a murder. That really rocked her. Turning off Perry to the project, even making him sweat, was one thing. Killing him was something else.

"I still don't like Clip for it," said Shayne. "That Irving, the nurse, is too quick with a gun. Or Traynor, the Ugandan defector.

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Maybe even the old man himself."

Suzy said she was pretty sure that there was more to Gambling Intentional than an innocent society to cure gamblers.

"Coffee," grunted Shayne. "Those bags in the rear."

"I think they smuggle it," said Suzy. "Gambling Intentional is only a front. After all, Clip's last overseas job was with Uganda, and they export mostly coffee beans."

"No wonder Chadwick couldn't afford publicity."

Suzy went on to say that she had argued with Fletch to get out of Miami when she saw him earlier. She could forgive him, even for not coming forward when Perry was murdered—if Perry had corrupted his wife. But now Fletcher wanted money from Clip's operation. He tried to talk Chadwick into taking on Suzy and himself.

"I just wanted Fletch to make his statement to the police and for us to get out of town," said Suzy. "There are other jobs Fletch wanted you to talk about to Uncle Chadwick—he likes us both. But Clip doesn't. He tried to shoot us tonight."

"You're sure it was Clip."

"I'm sure it was Clip. His bullet creased Fletch's shoulder. I went along with him in his car. I thought I could argue him into giving up. But when I insisted I wouldn't join the coffee operation, Fletch—Fletch—"

Her voice got thick. Shayne decided it was the end of an affair.

"What will Fletch do now?"

"He's—crazy, Mike. Perry kept him poor, he says. Now even that job is gone and he's really wild to get some money. I'm afraid he'll keep pushing, and next time Clip won't miss."

Suzy slid along the seat. For a startled moment, Shayne thought she had fainted or dissolved into tears. Instead, she laid her head in his lap as he drove, staring up at him through the steering wheel, stretched out along the front seat. She yawned.

"A reporter told me there was a job open on a local TV station as a weather girl," she said. "I may stay in Miami."

Shayne was about to tell Suzy that it was dangerous to drive a car with a woman's head in his lap. Then he looked down at the beautiful face and the shimmering expanse of black hair and decided it didn't have to be dangerous, if he drove at a reasonable rate. There was no traffic.

"Your face looks funny, looking up from here." She laughed.

"Yours looks fine," he answered, "but Uncle Tim might think us too friendly."

"We won't tell him," she said.

She was asleep in five minutes. The bounce-back powers of the young were incredible, thought Shayne . . .

After Shayne dropped Suzy off at Lucy's for safekeeping, he rolled wearily to his own apart-

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ment. It had been a long, long day. Still, there was progress. He looked beyond Gambling Intentional toward what Chadwick's real game was.

Some of the sense of unreality had cleared away. Shayne knew he'd have to tackle the coffee smuggling angle, but that could wait until tomorrow at least. Grab whoever wore that gorilla mask—that could be only one of four people and that, plus getting hold of Fletcher, should wrap the whole thing up.

If Shayne hadn't been so tired, Irving the gun-happy nurse companion would never have gotten the drop on him. Shayne came out of the self-service elevator from the garage, yawning. The fat German came out of the cover of a doorway down the hall and shoved his automatic in Shayne's back as the detective bent his large frame to insert his doorkey.

"Chadwick wants to see you, Shayne. *Privately,*" said the man in a guttural voice.

Shayne straightened up slowly. He remembered the way the gun-careless Irving had fired into the roof of the hangar to get people's attention at the gambling meet.

"It's pretty late—I'm tired," he protested. He half-turned to eye the fat man.

"Get going."

The eyes were hard. Shayne rolled his own eyes and sighed. "All right, Irving. Let me get my keys." He bent to pluck his key chain from his door and, awkwardly, it seemed, dropped them. Irving's eyes momentarily flicked to the floor to see the keys fall. Shayne's big right fist slammed into his stomach and the air rushed out of the man.

"Ouffff!" His eyes got big. He dropped his automatic, which bounced on the hallway rug. "Ah—ah—ah—" He stood almost on tiptoe from the agony of the blow, his breathing apparatus paralyzed. He flung both arms around his middle.

"Ouuuuuu," he gasped. He bent over, retching, both hands on his stomach. Shayne kicked the gun out of his reach. He needed no weapon. With his long legs, he could reach the gun faster than Irving, no matter how you cut it.

Red-faced, Irving went on wheezing for air.

"You'll admit you weren't polite," said Shayne.

Two fat arms extended towards Shayne and for a second the detective thought he might have to belt Irving again. But the man merely caught Shayne's shoulders and sagged.

"You—shouldn't—hit—me, Shayne," He croaked. "I've got a bad heart. You should never hit a man with a bad heart like that." The eyes, so recently murderous looked panicked now.

"You didn't tell me you had a bad heart."

Irving let go of Shayne and slid to a sitting position on the floor.

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"I'd better rest, Shayne. I can feel my heart thumping."

"So's mine," said Shayne. "Listen, Irving, are you all right."

"I'm not so good, Shayne."

"Can I get you something?"

"I should be in bed," said Irving. "I shouldn't stay up so late, not with my condition."

"Maybe you should lie down and I'll unloosen your tie." Shayne watched for the ploy. There was more than one way to disarm an opponent.

"No, but I'll have to take a pill. You must get me a glass of water, Shayne. Distilled water if you have it."

Shayne grunted and got Irving a glass of water from his apartment. It was not bottled water. Shayne remembered to take Irving's gun with him. But Irving docilely took his pill . . .

Down in the garage, Shayne felt the madness of this situation grow. "You mean to tell me you want to capture me to go to Chadwick's and I'll have to use my own car?" he asked Irving.

"You can't expect me to drive *my* car," said Irving. "Not in my condition. I could have an attack and cause an accident."

"Yes. I'd better drive," said Shayne.

After they were rolling, Irving protested. "You're driving too fast, Shayne. You clipped that green light back there and the other car started too soon. Things like that speed up the heart."

"I'll be more careful," said Shayne. Sometimes things happened that you wanted to save for your memoirs. Now Irving closed his eyes and seemed to be trying to rest.

"Does Uncle Chadwick have a bad heart?" Shayne asked him.

"Of course not," said Irving.

"But you're his nurse-companion. *You* have a bad heart."

"I'm living on the fringe." The fat man's voice quavered a little to consider his dramatic plight. "I have a very bad heart."

"How come a well man has a sick man for a nurse?" asked Shayne.

Irving opened his eyes and stared at Shayne as if he were stupid. "That's a dumb question, Shayne. *Chadwick* doesn't have to work for a living. *I* have to work for a living."

"Oh, I see," said Shayne. Moments like this made his profession precious to him . . .

Uncle Chadwick's apartment was in a modest neighborhood. The apartment itself was spacious but also modest in its furnishings. Apparently the old man spent his money on clothes, like the tailored monogrammed robe he wore. Shayne didn't have to say anything. Irving said it all, complaining about his treatment at the hands of the detective.

"That's all right, Irving," Chadwick soothed. "*C'est bien.* You go to bed now. I'll take my vitamins all right. I'll be fine."

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Irving retreated to what was obviously the doorway to a small bedroom. "I'll say good night now. Shayne, I want you to remember not to hit people with bad hearts."

"I'll be very, very careful," Shayne promised as the big man lumbered off lugubriously.

VI

AS SOON AS the door closed, Chadwick beckoned to Shayne. "This man Fletcher showed up here a short while ago. He'd been shot, Mr. Shayne. It is really a terrible thing. I wanted to send him to a hospital but he wanted to talk to you first. So I sent Irving."

He led Shayne to a second bedroom, a large one, probably his own. There was a night light beside the bed and Shayne found himself staring down, at last, on Fletcher, Perry's research man, cameraman, and Suzy's friend.

Fletcher's face was gaunt. His cheeks were deeply sunken and his eyes were bright with fever. He was not a bad-looking man, of average height and build with brown hair streaked with early gray.

"Fletcher—Mike Shayne," said Shayne.

The eyes rolled upward and stared at him. Fletcher half-nodded and painfully pulled himself up to a sitting position. He turned on the light beside the bed.

"I've been shot. It was young Weber."

"Suzy told me."

Shayne moved forward to look at the wound. It looked painful, a deep groove along the back of the shoulder—but certainly not fatal.

"Chadwick wants me to go to the hospital. They'll put me in a security ward, won't they, Shayne?"

"Yes," said Shayne. "A material witness. I'd think so."

"I've got to tell you a couple of things first. Things you should know. Things not for the police."

Shayne eased into a chair beside the bed. From the doorway, Chadwick told them that an ambulance was on its way. He looked relieved to turn the whole affair over to the detective.

"You'd find this out anyway, Shayne." Fletcher's eyes restlessly roamed the room. "Perry was a blackmailer. His whole TV documentary company was a front."

He went on to say that he had once thought Garland Perry slightly crazy because the New York man had had offers to make films for all of the networks at various times, but always refused. Then, as time passed, Fletcher caught on to the real operation Perry ran.

"He'd find somebody that had money and an operation that didn't relish publicity. He'd make sounds like doing a documentary that would be an expose'. Then

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he'd take payoffs. A few times a year, he did legitimate shows to protect himself. He hired kids like Suzy, who wouldn't ask too many questions. There was only one other trained man like myself."

"So he came down here to look into the coffee business of Chadwick's Gambling Intentional," said Shayne. He kept his voice low, but the old man was in the other room.

"You know about that? Yes. He wanted them to buy him out. Perry was a crud, Shayne. In lots of ways. I was married once and he—" Fletcher pulled himself up at an attack of pain. He gasped. Then he went on.

"Forget that. Anyway, I'm glad I shook him up with the film. I'm glad Clip shot him. Me—and lots of people—won't miss Garland Perry." The man's face twisted in hate. Then he regained control and went on again.

"I hear you've got clout with the Miami Police, Shayne. You should tell Jensen or whoever your police chief friend is."

"You can make a statement," said Shayne. He heard the faint sound of the ambulance siren. The old man came to the bedroom door.

"Can I help? Would you like a glass of water, Mr. Fletcher."

"Yeah, I'm burning up," said Fletcher. "*Jesus,* I hurt!"

Chadwick gestured down th darkened hall. "You get the water. I'll wet another towel for the poor man's head. *Mauvais,* Shayne, *mauvais.*"

As Shayne went to the kitchen, he found his mind buzzing with new questions. How could Fletcher be so sure Clip Weber had shot Perry and himself? Why did Fletcher want so badly to tell him about Perry's outfit? It would have come out anyway in a few more days' digging. And what was *wrong* with Fletcher? Had he lost too much blood?

The kitchen was dark. Shayne snapped on the light—and found himself staring into the ugly gorilla mask he had last seen in the airport hangar. The grotesque figure still wore the plaid coat and gloves and carried a revolver. The man who wanted Fletcher dead had followed, or somehow found, his quarry a second time.

Shayne dived at the man's legs. The attacker reacted almost as quickly. He fired, but much too high, and the bullet buried itself in the kitchen wall. The man came down with Shayne's tackle. Quickly the detective crawled up the big body to snatch off the mask. He found himself staring into the black face of Traynor. Traynor's eyes bored into his.

Shayne had to leave himself open to make that grab for the mask. Traynor hit him at the base of his neck and the detective felt a gout of pain and saw blinding light for a moment. Traynor was not only as big as a professional football tackle, he was as tough.

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He jerked free of Shayne, got to his feet and swung out of the door into the hall.

Shayne moved as fast as he could—which was not as fast as he normally moved. The fatigue of the day, plus the shock of the blow, slowed him. Still he sped down the hall in pursuit of the ex-Ugandan as fast as his condition permitted.

Shayne's only thought was that somehow Fletcher had confused Clip with Traynor and, if he could only catch the disguised man, he might put some kind of a wrap on the case right now. Especially now that he had Fletcher and lots of the answers.

To his disgust, Traynor went down the stairs increasing his lead on Shayne. The man was in excellent physical condition. Even when Shayne felt the cool of the outside air on his face and acquired new energy, Traynor kept his lead, his strong legs pumping as they raced past the arriving ambulance and down the street.

Shayne hung on doggedly, sprinting full out as he saw Traynor turn a corner. He was getting his second wind now. As he rounded the corner, he saw, to his dismay, that Traynor again had lucked in. A big truck was just passing and the black man jumped on the back to hook a ride. The driver did not see him, of course, and paid no attention to Shayne's roar of anger or his shout to stop. He probably thought Shayne was some late-night drunk and just kept wheeling, with Traynor clinging to the back of the truck . . .

It was another couple of hours before Shayne got back to his own apartment. Fletcher had to be bundled off to the hospital, reports made for the police and Shayne had a few minutes' talk with Uncle Chadwick. The old man told him that he suspected Clip and some of his overseas friends were up to something behind his back, but he wasn't exactly sure what it was. *Vraiment!* Truly!

More lies, Shayne thought. Old Chadwick had been stumbling over coffee bean bags for weeks and it was unbelievable that he didn't know what that something was. But Shayne knew he could ask questions more intelligently when he was rested, so he put that chore off until the next day. And went home, this time to bed and a beautiful deep sleep.

He awoke the next morning to read in the newspapers that Fletcher had arrived at the hospital dead. Shayne put in two calls even before he had breakfast. One was to Tim to look into the files on the subject of coffee imported from Uganda.

The other was to the Police Department to see what time he could catch his old friend, Will Gentry, Chief, between tasks. Then Shayne headed for Joe's Diner to wrap his tongue around eggs, bacon, toast and lots of black coffee. He had been too tired

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to eat the night before.

His first call was on Will Gentry at the Police Department. The beefy, scowling Chief mangled his usual unlit cigar as he studied the overnight reports on Fletcher.

"Nobody dies from a bullet crease in the neck" said Gentry. "I was shot like that once. It hurt like hell but I played softball next day."

"What do your boys say, Will?"

"That the bullet went in deep and worked its way in even deeper. Must have reached the spinal cord. A freak thing. And we don't get to ask any more questions of a man who could give us plenty more. There'll be an autopsy, of course, but that takes a few days."

Gentry was glad to get Shayne's report on Perry's TV company, as related by Perry.

"By God, you're helping us on this one, Mike! Stuff like that repositions some of these cases. We've started to look real close at one Garland Perry.

"Gambling Intentional? Chadwick and Weber?"

Gentry told him they hadn't had any knocks on the airport operation. Undercover had checked it out because the people were Miami citizens, but it was actually not Miami police territory.

"Chadwick was picked up on a con once a long time ago, according to bunco. His rich relatives bailed him out. After that, he stayed off our records. Young Weber is a wildass type but he's never had any trouble of record with us. One of our detectives picked up a rumble that he's out of the state, maybe on the West Coast."

Shayne was glad Gentry knew that. Clip was, after all, the son of his clients and he still hoped to clear him. He had known about the West Coast postcard and been reluctant to tell Will about it, but now Gentry knew. Shayne suspected that he'd clear up a lot of things about Clip when he put Chadwick through the grinder. *And* when he caught up with Traynor. He hoped young Clip was really out of town.

"Yeah, we got a ticket out on this Traynor," said Gentry when Shayne asked. "You and Tim's niece can back up the warrant on that one for shooting Fletcher. It's murder now."

Shayne knew there was no point in asking Gentry about the coffee smuggling. He'd have to check with Customs on that. But he did ask about possible defectors from Uganda located in Florida, whether there had been any police problem with them.

Gentry got up and paced, frowning. "Mike, you've helped a lot on this Perry murder. I can't tell you anything officially, because we haven't run into any of those boys. But Miami's a center for exiles of every sort on this side of the world, so we keep our eyes and ears open. There's a chap

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around town who calls himself 'Thomas Black'. He's the one to talk to. Len Sturgis or one of the other boys down there will give you our contact."

"Thanks, Will. Happy hunting."

"Happy hunting," Gentry returned. For once the two old friends were not battling over some aspect of the case, thought Shayne, feeling benevolent. He took Will outside to meet Tim's niece Suzy. They found her surrounded by several detectives who seemed bent on selling the virtues of Miami and a job in the police department to the girl.

Today she wore a soft grey pants suit of lustrous texture and a belt of golden chains about her slim waist. She was, as usual, a picture of style and sex, and Gentry was impressed.

As Shayne left, Gentry pulled him back to say, "I hope they don't recruit her. I've already got a couple of pretty women sergeants and I don't need any more dolls in the Department to slow things up."

"Watch that chauvinism," said Shayne as he hurried on to catch up with Suzy.

Shayne and Suzy went on to lunch with Tim at The Beef House, where they found him in a very expansive mood as he usually was when he had a headful of information for Shayne.

"Idi Amin's been sending planeloads of coffee right into Florida for some time now," Tim began after they had ordered their luncheon. "Flights to Melbourne. He uses American and English pilots a lot. He brings in the coffee and flies back everything from electronics to prize Hereford cattle, all kinds of stuff. He can afford it, because one of those big planes can carry fifty tons of beans and a ton sells wholesale for seven thousand dollars."

Shayne whistled. "Three hundred and fifty thousand dollars a load."

Tim nodded. "That's his big cash crop. With that kind of value, his State Research boys come along on every trip. Some of them have defected, all right, asked for asylum in this country. Which they get. Amin's not too popular. His State Research Bureau has a pretty bad name around the world."

"So Clip worked for him and may be smuggling in extra coffee," said Suzy. She looked low.

"Could be," said Shayne. "Those coffee beans had to come from somewhere, and there's Traynor."

Suzy, Shayne thought, bore up rather well on receiving the news of Fletcher's death. He had filled her in on what happened at Chadwick's last night and she cried a little. But he was pretty sure that whatever there was between her and Fletcher had ended when Fletcher pushed her

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out of the car. Even if he had lived, their romance would have been over. She'd survive, but the poor kid had really taken a beating on this trip to Miami.

Tim went on to say that Ugandan coffee imports ran well over two hundred million dollars a year. The grade of coffee was one called *robusta,* a cheaper grade than the more elegant *arabica* from South America.

"With coffee prices so high," said Shayne, "they're better off to have the cheaper grade to sell."

"True," said Tim. "One more important fact. There're probably four thousand or more refugees from Uganda in the U.S. Lots of 'em could have connections back in Africa, so Clip and Traynor could use some of these for smuggling."

Shayne said he meant to look into this and had leads. But his interview with Chadwick came first. He wanted to settle in his own mind, once and for all, whether or not the old man knew about the smuggling.

A subdued Suzy said she meant to spend the afternoon going shopping. She'd had enough excitement for a little while. So the trio broke up.

VII

SHAYNE DREW a blank when he reached Chadwick's apartment. Nobody answered the door. As he stood there, writing a note to leave, a mousy little lady peered out to say that he was wasting his time. Mr. Chadwick had had a heart attack that morning and been taken to a hospital.

The nurse, Irving, whom she knew slightly, told her that it wasn't severe but that the old man would be held in intensive care for observation for a few days. End of his chance to question Chadwick. Irving had, of course, gone with Uncle Chadwick, so there was no one to interview.

Chadwick's attack didn't surprise Shayne. The old man was sprightly but he was, after all, over seventy. The pressure of the Perry murder, the closing of his Gambling Intentional enterprise, plus the episode with Fletcher last night would surely be enough to drive the old man deep into anxiety and the heart problem.

Shayne spent the rest of the afternoon trying in vain to reach "Thomas Black," the Ugandan who had once been in the State Research Bureau and who had defected, to become a local leader of the exiles. It was both tricky and time consuming.

Calls had to be made, people had to be seen, arrangements had to be waited for. Shayne fell back on his slogging patience which was just as great an asset to the detective as a bright mind or quick reflexes. Those who could not bite into a case and hang on through the drudgery didn't belong in the profession.

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Dusk. Shayne sat in a grubby coffee shop in the black part of town, observing a six-story tenement across the street. He was finally close to his goal. Somewhere in that tan brick building was Thomas Black, who was supposed to know all of the important things, legal and otherwise, that went on among Ugandan exiles. His last contact told him that in due time a guard would cross the street and escort him to Black's apartment. He had only to wait.

Shayne took an occasional sip of greasy coffee and covered the taste with a cigaret. This interview could wrap up the case. He watched a couple come down the street, a white woman and a black man. The woman seemed to be drunk. The man urged her towards the same tan building Shayne watched. It wasn't that the young woman was reluctant—she was just too drunk to navigate well.

Shayne's mind slid back to his case. Ferret out the details of the smuggling, grab Traynor—and the rest would finally fall into place. He still had hopes that he could exonerate young Weber for his clients, but this time his clients' son looked guilty. So be it.

The black man and the white woman were now at the door of the tenement. An attractive young woman with long black hair, wearing a grey pants suit of lustrous weave. About her waist was a belt of golden links, seductively loose around her hips.

Shayne's eyes narrowed and then he leapt to his feet.

Suzy, for God's sake!

He now saw that the black man had big shoulders and a football tackle's build. *Traynor!*

Even as he slid out from the table, the two of them disappeared into the building Shayne was watching, the building that held Thomas Black.

He could call the police and then go in, or he could save time and go in alone. He did not hesitate. He was halfway across the street even as the possibility of calling for help flicked in his mind. Wailing sirens could turn his effort into a fiasco.

The door to the street was locked of course, but Shayne's big shoulder pounded it open and he almost fell into the arms of two guards who held the fort in the foyer. Both guards were black and almost as big as Traynor. There was no sight of Traynor or Suzy.

"The man that just came in—" said Shayne. "The woman—I've got to see them."

The guards had pushed him back and stood there, shoulder to shoulder, hostile, coats back to show that they were armed.

"Nobody came in here, Whitey," said one.

"You've got the wrong building," said the other.

"I've got the *right* building," said Shayne. "In fact, I've been waiting across the street for one of you to come get me. I've got an

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interview cleared with Thomas Black. I also know that man who just came in. His name's Traynor and he's a defector from Uganda, and the woman he's with is a friend of mine. She's important in a murder case, and Traynor may be doing her some harm."

He flashed his credentials and told them he didn't expect to waste much time in the foyer—he wanted to reach Suzy, Traynor and Thomas Black in that order.

"Well, now," said one. "I never heard of a Traynor or a Thomas Black, did you, Fred."

"Nope, never did," said Fred.

They grinned at him maddeningly.

"Your group," said Shayne with menace, "is okay with the Miami police just now. You've got your own worries—that some of those State Research types that fly in with the coffee might come after some of you. Why make extra trouble for yourselves? I know Chief Gentry and I can fill this building with cops in ten minutes."

"He knows the Chief of Police, Fred."

"Fancy that!"

"You men have ten seconds to call Black and—"

One of the guards pulled out a gun. "Beat it, Mister."

Shayne's anger exploded and his foot moved at the same instant. The guard holding the gun never had time to tighten his grip on it. It flew up in the air over his head. The second guard plunged at Shayne with big fist traveling. Shayne accepted the fist, ducked and turned and the guide went moving on past him to crash into the wall.

The second guard leaped at him. Shayne took him back with the power of the man's own rush and sidestepped to let the charging guard crash his head into the wall.

Two stunned guards looked up at Shayne from the floor, at Shayne holding his gun on them.

"Now then, why don't you call Thomas Black," said Shayne.

"Yeah, Fred," drawled a voice from the stairs above. "Why don't you do that? You were supposed to go over and bring in this Shayne ten minutes ago. But you just had to finish that beer."

Shayne peered upward and had to swallow. There were two more tough looking men on the stairs. Both of them held machine pistols.

Shayne said to the man on the stairs, "I also want to see Traynor and the girl."

The man came down the stairs slowly, followed by his companions. "You'd best see Black first, Shayne. Nothing will happen to the girl. Traynor took her to Costa, that's all. Traynor's probably already gone out the back."

"Who's Costa and—"

Shayne stopped at the man's gesture. It said he'd be taken care of. The man went to the guard

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called Fred and jerked him up to his feet by his necktie.

"You think it's enough to be tough? You just found out there's always somebody tougher. I'm glad this man showed you. You want to survive, you get smart. Smart is better than tough."

Shayne followed the two newcomers up dark winding stairs, grateful that the men with machine pistols knew who he was. Otherwise it could have been exceedingly thick in the foyer.

His escorts took him to the top floor. They led him into an apartment that was neither tenement hole nor luxurious. Exiles generally existed on limited funds.

This was an acceptable place to live, Shayne decided, if you were a refugee from a dangerous and vindictive government. Anonymous, easy to guard, probably equipped with special exits that a middle class real estate agent wouldn't approve of.

His escorts left him alone in the living room which contained cheap sofas, plain chairs, a thin rug and a modest TV set. They let him keep his gun.

There were several doors, but Shayne did not test any of them. After a few seconds, one opened and Thomas Black came out. He was slim, well-dressed and had intelligent brown eyes. He was very black. He barely touched Shayne's hand in greeting. The eyes were wary and Shayne knew there was steel beneath his impassive exterior.

Shayne told Black his reason for the visit and the added problem of Traynor and the girl.

A quick smile touched Black's lips. "Traynor is our local clown. What do you call such a one in English? Court Jester, perhaps. He's more of an embarrassment than an asset. We don't see much of him and that makes us happy. He brought the girl here to be killed. Turned her over to one of our more effective members, Costa, along with a fee of five thousand dollars."

Shayne tensed, but Black waved a hand. "The girl's safe. She seems doped up, drunk or something, but safe. We can use the money. We don't kill people as Traynor seems to feel we would do so easily. So we'll keep the money but return the girl to you. Traynor needs a lesson."

Black moved to a phone and spoke into it softly. Like Traynor and the others, his voice had a soft accent that revealed his native tongue wasn't English.

Black hung up and faced Shayne. "I can quickly answer your other questions. There is no coffee being smuggled out of Uganda to Florida. Not by the State Research Bureau, not by the Coffee Marketing Board Amin has in New York. Certainly not by any chain of exiles like myself or others. We simply don't have the resources and the government doesn't have the motive."

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Shayne told him about the warehouse and described the bags.

Black nodded. "I know of your Clip Weber. He flew for the government for a while. That's where he met Traynor. Many American and English pilots—pilots of all nationalities—have flown for my former government. The pay's good, up to four thousand a month.

"But they quit all the time. Nobody works for Amin for long. It's the atmosphere. It's why my friends and I are in Miami, not Uganda. Clip Weber quit. He did not take any coffee with him, although he might have gotten a few bags through Traynor when Traynor quit." Black paused and stared at the wall.

"How can I explain it to you, Mr. Shayne? Your Clip Weber is too small—too unimportant—ah, let us say that his status would have been that of a useful office boy. I've checked all of this carefully. That's why it took you so long to reach me. You can count on it."

Shayne thanked him and at that moment another of the doors opened and the men who had escorted Shayne upstairs brought in Suzy. Shayne knew at once she'd been doped. Her eyes were unfocussed, her coordination poor and she didn't recognize him for several moments. Then she came to him unsteadily and leaned on his arm.

As Shayne moved to take her out, Black said, "Here's something that may be of use to you, Mr. Shayne. My people tell me somebody around town is running a con based on coffee. There's a streetwise word for it. A Ponti—no, a Ponzi."

Shayne thanked him again and took Suzy out of the building. He was anxious to find out how Traynor had got hold of Suzy, but he soon saw he wasn't going to find that out until she had slept off her present condition. She could only grin loosely and mutter unintelligible words. She couldn't walk unassisted. Shayne didn't know what had been given her but he'd had enough experience to know that she was in no immediate danger. Bed and a good night's sleep would be the best cure.

At Lucy's, he found his secretary had gone out for the evening to have dinner with a woman friend. So he dropped Suzy on the bed in the spare room where she had been staying, taking off only her shoes. He covered her with a blanket and left, his mind working furiously.

VIII

THE CASE had shifted again. Gambling Intentional was not set up to cure gamblers and it was not set up to smuggle coffee. It was set up as a confidence game, somehow using coffee. A Ponzi.

Shayne sat down in Lucy's living room and called Tim Rourke. Tim

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hadn't known anything about Suzy's disappearance with Traynor and Shayne decided not to bother him with that information just yet.

"Tim, you remember that character Traynor belted when we went out to the airport the other day. You were going to check him out for me."

"I did that, my lad. I did it this afternoon. It's the first time things have been quiet enough. His name's Rakestraw and he's been making a pot of money out of Gambling Intentional. Chadwick Weber must be smuggling in Uganda coffee in huge planeloads.

"Rakestraw—and a whole lot of others—put in a thousand dollars one week and two weeks later collect two thousand. He says a small group in G-I is really coining the money. Most of the people aren't in on it. But Chadwick takes a few select ones back behind that wall and shows 'em the goods. And they invest. And they make big bucks, very fast."

"So the fake front not only covers hot investments but gives Chadwick a chance to screen prospects for future investing.

"That's what Rakestraw says. He wanted to plunk down some money with Chadwick the day we were there. Traynor wouldn't let him in. He was a little drunk and insisted and Traynor gave him a fat lip. A break for us—he's sore at them. He says the real investors are all sworn to secrecy.

"Anybody that tips the smuggling act gets cut-off. I wouldn't have gotten a word out of him if Traynor hadn't bashed him around. But the profits are so good he wants to get right back in."

"They should be," said Shayne. "It's a Ponzi."

There was a moment's silence and then Tim whistled. "My God! A Ponzi! Who'd have thought it."

"Reach in that prodigious memory, Tim. I know a Ponzi is a con game, but I don't know why it's called that."

"Charles Ponzi, Italian immigrant, master con man. Way back in the 1920's, he ran a scheme that made millions. Widows, businessmen, tycoons all over the country, flooded his office in Boston with money. He promised everybody to double their loot in ninety days—and he did it. Cleaned up fifteen million in 1920 dollars from that operation.

"He had a gimmick, which was Postal Reply coupons. You bought these coupons abroad for a penny. Mailed to the U.S. they were worth six cents. In stamps. The coupons were supposed to be used in place of foreign postage stamps."

"Chadwick's gimmick is hot coffee."

"Yeah, I see. It doesn't matter what the gimmick is. That's beside the point. Your Ponzi man takes the money of the second investor to pay off the first and the third to pay off the second, and so on. As

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long as the money comes in from new investors, the old ones get paid off—and often reinvest.

"In his office in Boston, Ponzi had money stuffed in desk drawers and even in wastebaskets to take care of the overflow. It must have been wild. They couldn't figure it out at first. It didn't seem illegal—the hard American dollar at that time made it all sound logical. The cops and postal inspectors dropped in on him, but they ended up investing their own funds."

"They finally nailed him, I suppose."

"They sure did. He drew time and served several sentences and then ran to Italy to avoid more sentences. He pulled out of Italy before World War II and went to Brazil. He didn't have the touch any more. He died in a charity hospital there, as I recall. He only had enough money to pay for his own funeral, which he gave to the nurses. I think he only had about seventy-five dollars at the end."

Shayne thanked Tim. After he hung up, he fixed himself a Martell and prowled Lucy's apartment, thinking. He could understand now why Perry came to Miami with his threat to make a TV show out of Gambling International. There was big money, easy money, rolling in.

He could also understand why Traynor, Clip and Chadwick had to take care of Perry. Once the money machine had the sand of suspicion thrown in it, it would grind to a halt, with jail sentences around the corner. But it was damned clever of the team to pick on gamblers for victims. They were the kind of people, above all, to hook the easiest on a Ponzi.

So much for the benign old man. He was a thief and a hypocrite, hurting the very people he claimed to help. And probably a murderer. But why Suzy? He could understand killing Perry and Fletcher, but not the girl.

Shayne went over the events of last night at Chadwick's apartment. The old man had sent him into the kitchen to get a glass of water, and Traynor was waiting. Was Shayne himself supposed to be hit? But that didn't make sense at all. Even if the team wanted to hit him, why use Traynor who was too squeamish to kill?

Shayne heard the soft sound of the apartment door closing. Almost without thinking he hit the carpet on his hands and knees and ducked behind the chair he'd been sitting in. His gun appeared quickly in his hand. It was that kind of a case.

He peered and saw nothing. Yet there was no doubt that somebody had come in the apartment—to finish the job of killing Suzy? He made a rush for the bedroom door, which was ajar, went in, crouched low and did a one-eighty with his gun at the ready.

Nobody. He straightened up, puzzled. There were Suzy's clothes, the jumpsuit, the gold link

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belt, her shoes and—

The bed was empty!

Shayne gave a groan. He hadn't undressed the girl but there were her clothes. The closing door had not been somebody coming in. It had been Suzy going out. Shayne had had enough experience with zonked people to know how irrational they could be.

He dashed to the street, tucking his gun away. There was no doubt about the direction she'd taken. All along the walk under the street lights, people were staring, frozen in astonishment. Shayne started running—he could see a blurred figure up ahead. In the first block he gained, and now he could see that Suzy at least wore a robe. It must be one of Lucy's and it fluttered up ahead as if she were a human-sized bird about to take off.

He passed a couple of young men.

"Did you see it?" one asked.

"Saw it? *Loved* it!" said the other. "Nothing on but a robe. Clear open and everything bouncing."

Poor Suzy—she was really spaced out. Shayne redoubled his speed and caught up with her in the third block. At that point, he no longer needed to run. She had been captured by one of Miami's finest, a policeman who had stepped out of his squad car to intercept. His partner still sat inside the car, his eyes big, but grinning.

"I'll take her," said Shayne. "She's the niece of a friend of mine." His cheeks burned. Even now Suzy had only half-closed her robe and her eyes were wild.

The cop stared at Shayne and back at Suzy. "That's a new one," he said. "What kind of parties does this friend of yours put on?"

Suzy turned to look at Shayne and some of the wildness slid out of her eyes.

"Oh, *Mike!*" she called and pulled free of the policeman to throw herself into Shayne's arms. The robe flew open again and her warm, nude body pressed into him as he struggled to get out his wallet.

"This is gonna be Public Indecency, Mister," said the cop, his eyes hard.

"Hey, Joe." The man in the car beckoned his partner. The cop went over to talk to the man in the car, pulled by the urgent tone.

"It's all right, Suzy." Shayne gently disentangled himself from the girl and closed her robe. He had a pulse from running—and from the hug.

The cop came back. "Uh—my partner recognizes you, Mr. Shayne. Can you manage to get her off the streets? And tell your friend to keep a closer eye on your—his—that niece?"

"I can manage," said Shayne stiffly.

"Glad to give you a ride to—wherever the party is," offered

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the man in the car. His eyes dwelt in appreciation on Suzy's figure. Shayne recognized the face, if not knowing the man. An oldtimer who had probably seen him on a number of cases.

"Thanks, but no thanks," said Shayne. "We'll walk." He gave an extra salute of thanks to the man who had recognized him and started off. Will Gentry would have a lot of fun with it if he had ended up in the fish tank downtown with an undressed Suzy.

At that, he took her back at a trot, running a gauntlet of staring faces who had seen Suzy's dash in the opposite direction earlier. The fast walk would help clear her head, he thought, annoyed with the girl. He gave her round behind an impatient slap as they reached the apartment entrance and she yelped and went in nimbly.

Once inside Lucy's place, again he spun her around. "Now, young lady, I want to know—"

Her run had invigorated her. Her cheeks were red, her eyes sparkled and she was breathing fast. She whipped the robe open and pressed into his arms again.

"I don't *care*. I *want* you, Mike Shayne! I want you *completely!*"

Again that soft body, without clothes, pressed to his. Shayne felt her fast-pounding pulse and sensed his own. Yes, the detective profession sometimes led into erotic situations. And embarrassing ones, too. The worst of it was, they were never situations where one could give way to emotions. Firmly, he disentangled himself from her a second time, closing her robe.

"Suzy, you're out of your head, for one thing. For another, even if you weren't, I'm committed elsewhere. *You* should know that."

Her eyes still gleamed in hunger. "Lucy doesn't have to know."

He sighed. "*I'd* have to know. Forget it, sugar. I like you. I'm impressed with your qualifications, but it won't work. Put on some clothes. I have to ask you some questions."

Her eyes lost the tense, sensual look. She laughed. "There's always tomorrow, Mike," she said.

She told him she had been shopping earlier when she ran into Uncle Chadwick, who told her Shayne was looking for her, that there had been an important development in the case. She went with Chadwick to his apartment, where his man from the airport, big black assistant, grabbed her and Uncle Chadwick shot something into her arm. The rest was a dream. Traynor took her—somewhere—and there were voices and people doing things and then Shayne came and took her home.

"I woke up," she said. "I guess I was still out of my head. I thought I was still in Chadwick's place and they were going to shoot me up again. I grabbed a robe and ran out to find you."

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"Next time, when you hunt me down, wear clothes," said Shayne.

She laughed softly and he suspected that she had not been as addled as she pretended to be. She probably did wild things like this every once in a while.

Then Shayne snapped out of his contemplation of the street race and jumped to the phone. He called the hospital where Uncle Chadwick was supposed to be.

When he hung up, the girl said, "I do remember one thing, Mike. Before the dope took full effect Uncle Chadwick told Traynor to meet him at the airport after he had taken care of me."

Shayne jumped up and Suzy said, "I'm going along."

"Not tonight, you aren't," he said. "You're going to bed and sleep off the rest of that shot."

"But I'm hyped now."

"Then walk around the bedroom four thousand times. For some reason, those jokers want you dead. You'll be safe here."

"I'll stay," she said, "if you'll promise to take me out on a date when this is over."

"I promise," said Shayne.

In his car, gunning out of town, the redhead smiled. He would take Suzy on a date all right—along with Lucy. And, to be on the safe side, with Uncle Tim, too. He wouldn't underestimate Tim's lustful little niece from now on. Tim and his blondes! Suzy and her letch for older men. Redheads preferred!

IX

THE DOOR TO the hangar was open. Shayne went in with gun at ready and once again found himself in the vast, cavern-like center of Gambling Intentional. This time, somebody had left a single bulb burning which threw weird patterns of shadows in every direction.

Nobody in sight. Moving softly and silently, Shayne made his way past the picnic tables to the door at the far end. It seemed like a hundred years since he had first seen that door—and begun to learn the secrets it hid.

Blackness . . . the heavy smell of coffee again . . . all those intersecting corridors. Shayne found nothing downstairs, as he turned his small flash in every corner.

He went up the stairs quietly. At the top, he paused to listen. No sound. No movement. He took the time on this visit to cut into one of the second floor bags. Sand. Pure, high grade Florida beach sand. Another bag held coffee beans. But a third and fourth held sand. The Ponzi! If he'd had time that first day to plug the bags up here, he might have caught onto the con aspect sooner.

The door. The place where he had found Suzy's jacket when she'd torn it off and rushed forward into Fletcher's arms. There was a light behind the door. Impatient, Shayne shoved it open and stood there as it swept back like a camera lens to reveal the

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interior of the room.

Traynor sat there, facing the door, grinning at him. Traynor was very, very dead. Two bullet holes in his chest. Kill or be killed. Traynor, the court jester, had failed his boss.

There was a whisper of feet behind him. Shayne whirled—to face Clip Weber, holding a rifle on him. Shayne knew then the case was over. . . .

The two men waited patiently in the room while a third man toiled up the stairs and came to the small apartment. When Uncle Chadwick came in, he wore the same disguise he had worn the night he'd tried to shoot Suzy and Fletcher. The plaid camel's hair coat that made his shoulders so wide. The gorilla mask. The same outfit he had made Traynor wear that night in his apartment to fool Shayne into thinking it was Traynor's outfit. Uncle Chadwick seemed to like the disguise.

He nodded to Shayne and Clip and took off the mask.

"Hello, boys."

"Hello, Uncle Chad," said Clip. His face looked sad. "I've been out on the coast. Then I read about the death of Fletcher, the TV man, and knew I had to come back."

"I was proud of that one, Clip," said Chadwick expansively. "The first time I only wounded him. I knew when he came to my apartment the shot wouldn't kill him. I convinced him that it was you and called Shayne. *You,* Mr. Shayne—*Gendarme.* Then I killed him almost before your eyes, Mr. Shayne. You were out chasing Traynor and I used an icepick in the neck. The wound concealed it."

Clip flinched and Shayne had to bat his eyes. Clip said, "I didn't mind Perry, Uncle Chad. He wasn't much. When you came out of the bedroom and shot him in the back, I tried to cover for you. I got out of town. I thought that would end the TV thing and you'd have the sense to lay low for a while. But then you did the Fletcher thing. That was too much."

"Ahh, Clip I wish it were possible. *Entre nous,* it was the fault of the girl. When she turned out to be Fletcher's romantic friend, I knew he had to go. And *she* had to go too, because a man alone you can pay off, but women get greedy. I got Fletcher, but Traynor failed me with the girl. Then he got scared of me and threatened me, so *he* had to go, too."

Uncle Chadwick motioned to the still form that they'd laid on the bed.

"It's too much, Uncle Chad. It has to end."

"But, Clip, I can take care of the girl tomorrow. I've found a perfect disguise." He fingered the gorilla mask fondly.

"Mr. Shayne won't like her hurt. She's his friend's niece."

Uncle Chadwick smiled his most winning smile at Shayne. "Oh,

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you won't mind, Shayne. Clip and I have tons of money. We've run the perfect Ponzi. We'll pay you well. All police are for sale, of course."

"Not this time, Uncle Chad."

The old man looked disappointed. "You mean the Ponzi is over, Clip?"

"Done. Over for good."

Uncle Chadwick rose to his full height. "It was my great triumph! You see, I was in Ponzi's office once when I was a mere stripling. Back right after World War I. I saw it, my friends. The piles of money, the activity in that Boston office. He had an importing company. How the people loved him, the way he made their money grow! How bright their faces looked when they brought in all that money! I knew I had to run my own Ponzi someday. Ours was fabulous, Clip. *Magnifique!*"

Clip glanced at Shayne. Shayne returned the look.

"It was good for a long time, Uncle Chad. But it's over now—forever."

They talked to the old man for several hours. It was dawn when Clip led them to the small plane he had used to fly to the site of Gambling Intentional. In the sky, Shayne was strapped in the rear seat while Uncle Chadwick sat alongside of Clip.

"The sun is fantastic, Clip," said Uncle Chad.

"It's going to be a fine day," said Clip.

Below them, the red sun turned gold and incredible rays shot up the sky making a backdrop that was real and yet so dazzling that it seemed unreal to Shayne.

"Turn the nose of the plane up, Clip," said Uncle Chadwick. "I'll go now."

"Sure, Uncle Chad."

They caught Shayne by surprise. He tried to struggle out of his seat, but gravity pressed him back, held him there, anchored tight.

Uncle Chadwick opened the side door of the plane as Clip climbed into the dawn.

"I really wouldn't care for jail at my age. You understand, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne roared at Clip but the flyer paid no attention. Shayne remained pinned to his seat.

"Goodbye, Clip."

"Goodbye, Uncle Chad."

"How was my Ponzi?" the old man asked Shayne anxiously as he perched on the edge of the open door. "Was it not great?"

Suddenly Shayne stopped struggling. There are some deaths that go beyond mundane requirements of the law.

"*C'etait magnifique,*" said Shayne and he felt a lump in his throat.

Uncle Chadwick nodded in satisfaction, smiled and went out backwards into space.

Shayne stuck his head through the white curtains that surrounded

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the bed in the hospital room. Irving lay there in comfort, staring up at the TV screen.

"How's the heart, Irving?"

Irving glared at him. "I have good days and I have bad days, Mr. Shayne."

"You shouldn't have checked in under Chadwick's name," said Shayne. "That confused things."

"He wanted me to. So I thought, why not? You gave me such a terrific beating, Shayne, that it wouldn't do any harm to get rest and a checkout. I want you to stop beating people with heart problems."

"I plan to be very careful about that, Irving. You taught me a lot. I'm sending up a steak from the kitchen in apology."

"I deserve it," grumbled Irving. "The food here could be better."

"*Bon appetite,*" grinned Shayne.

Shayne and Tim Rourke sat on the deck bar, watching a plane take off below. It carried Suzy and young Clip Weber off to Africa. This time, Suzy had her own TV backer, if not company, and the equipment and the pilot to help her make a wildlife film of the distant continent.

"Are they off the ground yet, Mike?"

"Running fast . . . lifting . . . and away they go!" said Shayne. He saluted the aircraft with his cognac, even though they couldn't see him. The final unreality of the case had been solved. He had fully expected to find Clip Weber in jail for the Ponzi and as an accessory in Perry's murder. He didn't see how Clip could escape that. He had forgotten Weber's ten-million-dollar trust fund—with which the aviator had paid back all the losses of the Ponzi bettors. Not a single complaint against him was left.

"The old boy helped me so much when I was a kid," Clip had told Shayne. "He gave me a sense of fun and life. I wanted him to have his Ponzi."

"I'm afraid he was a little too unstable to handle it when it got ready to fall," Shayne said.

"I made a mistake there. But Perry, Fletcher and Traynor didn't know how to have fun. Nobody misses 'em—their mistake."

Apparently, this was true. Nobody came forward to press charges in the Perry matter and so it was closed. And Clip and Suzy were gone.

Tim wore his old dark creased suit that looked as if it had been slept in. He raised his glass to Shayne.

"Suzy was fun, Mike, but I'm glad she's gone. That electronic journalism makes you a little erratic."

"She was that," Shayne agreed. "A little erratic." He smiled in fond memory. A good thing about being a private detective was that—you kept certain things forever private.

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Mistaken Identity

by MIKE TAYLOR

The Lynch Mob Was Determined to Have Revenge, and the Sheriff Was Caught in the Middle!

THE CRUISER'S high beams punched a yellow tunnel through the warm southern night. Tree-frogs chorused shrilly and night insects bounced and splattered against the wide windshield. Beyond the deep ditches on either side I caught glimpses of phantom trees draped in Spanish moss, branches bent menacingly toward the lonely stretch of blacktop. The smooth vibration of the motor through the floorboard was reassuring in the midnight strangeness of the country.

I switched on the overhead light and checked my passenger in the caged back seat. He was out cold, slumped uncomfortably against the right rear door, eyes slitted slightly from the morphine. After the dose I'd given him, he probably wouldn't stir before morning. I switched the light back off and lit a cigarette.

I fiddled with the police radio but none of the channels was carrying much in the way of entertainment. The squawk of distorted voices was irritating at that hour, so I turned it off too.

The dashboard clock said twelve-fifteen. Figuring we had left Morgantown at eleven-thirty, it couldn't be more than another forty or fifty minutes to Radford, the next county seat. If any of the trouble I expected was going to materialize it would have to be soon.

Almost in tune with my thoughts, the car rounded a long curve and a battered pick-up, parked sideways across the highway, sprang into the glare of my lights.

I braked slowly and felt for the strap that secured the heavy revolver in the holster on my right hip.

They didn't show themselves until I had come to a complete stop, then sprang up from the concealment of the ditches on either

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side and surrounded the car. All wore hoods of various shapes and designs, most of them apparently fashioned hastily out of flour sacks.

I suppressed a laugh.

A few carried shotguns or rifles, the rest were unarmed and held flashlights or hand-lanterns. I counted ten figures before one of them wrenched open the door on my side.

"Git out, sheriff," ordered a large shotgun-toter, voice muffled by the hood. "We're relieving you of yore prisoner."

I cut the engine and climbed out slowly, keeping my hands in sight. I have a great respect for a gun in the hands of an overexcited amateur. One of them stepped forward to lift my gun as I leaned against the car, but I shook my head and he stepped back.

"Never mind that," said the same man again, obviously the leader. "He ain't gonna shoot up no law-abidin',tax-payin' citizens. Not to protect that scum. C'mon. Yank his miserable carcass out of there and let's get goin'. We got us a party to attend."

"Wait a minute," I said. "You boys are buying a piece of trouble if you figure on taking Jackson away from me. I reckon you've got cause to be upset, but you're still not the law. I'm taking him into Radford and he'll stay there till he stands trial."

There were several growls and shouts of protest. "After what he did to Sarah Leighton and the Purdy kid?" demanded one of the figures in a high, thin voice. "No-sirree! We're going to see that this murderin' bastard gets what he deserves, not ten years of comfort in state prison and a parole. We're goin' to put him at the end of a long, straight rope."

"You're making a mistake," I told them. "If you take Jackson, in the eyes of the law you'll be as guilty of murder as he is."

"Not in the eyes of God we won't!" snarled somebody else. "*We'll* give him justice. The old-fashioned kind!" There was unanimous muttered agreement. They were a worked-up, dangerous mob.

"Did you see what he did to them, sheriff?"

"No," I said. "You boys know my jurisdiction doesn't extend into this county. Constable Downley called me earlier this evening because he was afraid Jackson wouldn't be safe in his jail. It appears he was right. I know he's killed two of your people, but I don't see how you can be of much help to them now."

The light from a lantern gleamed off my badge. There was a disgusted snort somewhere behind me.

"He slaughtered them," cried a distraught voice. "Sarah was a teller at the Citizen's Bank and he shot her three times when she screamed for help. Then he ran down little Jerry Purdy in the mid-

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dle of the street, tryin' to make his getaway. A man like that ain't human. He deserves to die and we're goin' to help him."

Somebody pulled the keys from the ignition and opened the back door. Two of them hauled the drugged man's body out and half-dragged him toward the bed of the pick-up.

"*Hey!* What's the matter with him? He ain't even movin'."

"He's under morphine," I said. "We're issued kits for transporting dangerous prisoners alone."

"I shore hope he wakes up before we stretch his neck. I'd hate to have him miss it."

"Now look — " I began.

"Just shut up, sheriff." It was the leader again. He leaned inside the cruiser and smashed the butt of his shotgun into the radio. "Now. Suppose you just climb back in your car. We're gonna move the truck back and we want you to drive right on, like nothing's happened.

"Don't stop till you get to Radford. Don't try to turn around and follow us, 'cause it won't do you no good. We know you're new here and can't identify any of us, so you can go with no fuss. We got to do this and couldn't nobody else have stopped us either, so don't feel too bad. No hard feelings, sheriff."

"No hard feelings," I grunted and crawled back into the car.

They backed the pick-up off to one side and I drove slowly past. I could see them staring after me in the rearview mirror. I grinned.

A couple of miles farther on the road was intersected by a north-south state highway. A sign that had seen considerable target practice said Radford was twenty-seven miles straight ahead. Color me impressed. I swung south and heaved a big sigh.

Lady Luck had really outdone herself this time, just when it looked like I had run my string. First a local-yokel lawman who hadn't checked my record close enough to realize that, since I'd been on and off the stuff for years, a normal dose of morphine had no more effect on me than a strong drink. There was a brief struggle when he tried to stuff me into the back seat and I was in control.

Then, best of all, enter one hate-filled lynch mob, so hot to hang somebody they just couldn't be convinced not to interfere. Suddenly I was a free man again. A seventy-mile drive to the state line and the disposal of the cop car were the only problems ahead of me, and they were so simple as to be laughable.

Much obliged, good citizens of Morgantown! I salute your zeal! A pretty fair job of acting, but then they had been too bloodthirsty to be critical. I laughed aloud, tramped down on the accelerator and went roaring down the dark highway to freedom.

I wondered how the boys were going to feel when they found out they had lynched the sheriff.

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JUNKMAN

by BEN SATTERFIELD

Lou Ritter Laid His Success to Luck. But There Was More to It than a Mere Whim of Fortune. He Was One Hell of a Cop!

"LUCK'S WHAT I got," said Lieutenant Ritter, explaining his rise in the department. "*Lucky Lew,* they used to call me." He grinned and leaned his chair back against the wall. "Now they call me *sir.*"

"Takes more than luck," Lelchuk said. At 36, he had just been promoted to sergeant, and knew that luck had nothing to do with *his* advancement. Unlike Ritter, he had no sense of style, only perserverance, a devotion to methodical routine, and he was as securely wrapped in his policeman's identity as a monk in his habit.

"Yeah, but luck's the most important thing in this work. The biggest busts I ever made were due to pure chance—for instance, did you know that I popped the 'Full Moon' killer by *mistake?*"

"What about C.C.Red?"

"Yeah, 'Robbin' Red'." Ritter smiled. "'Tornado Red' they called him, on account of his temper, I guess. Or maybe the way he could run through a bank. Anyway, he'd been holed up for two weeks after relieving the First National of forty-one grand in less than five minutes, and he was itchy.

"Got pig drunk, he had a fight with his girl friend, slugged her and passed out. She called the station about two a.m. and fingered him, said she was grabbing a thousand and splitting; not to look for her. I just happened to be in the building and took the call, otherwise McIntyre would've got it."

He chuckled. "Easiest collar I ever made. I had to wake the

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guy up to arrest him, already had the cuffs on. The only hassle was with the FBI—and counting the money."

"That's not the way you reported it."

"I promised the broad I'd keep her out of it. Besides, both the department and the newspapers love elaboration, not simplicity." Ritter held up his hands and shrugged. "What can I do?"

"Elaborate to your benefit, I guess."

"Let's just say I enhance . . . for cosmetic and dramatic purposes. Having luck's one thing, making the most of it's another."

Detectives Mather and Patino slouched in wearing beads and faded denim—they were both under thirty, about five ten, bearded and shaggy-haired. Ritter thought they looked like cops trying to look like hippies.

"Well, if it isn't Baretta and Serpico, the nemesis of the underworld." He shook his head. "How are things in crime city?"

"Polluted," Mather said.

"And you guys grow hair all over and maybe catch terminal scabies to score that information? I can look out the window and see as much."

"Can you see where it's coming from?" Patino asked. "Because if you can, I'll change clothes and sit up here all day and look out the window."

"Not me," Mather said. "I don't like consorting with undesirables that much."

"Maybe you're right," Patino said, wiggling his nose. "The perspective is too different from up here anyway."

Mather walked over and looked out the window. "Distorted." He crossed his arms and leaned against the frame, pretending to study the view. "Hell, from here things look pretty good."

"From *here,*" Patino said, "I can't tell a load of snow's hitting town, can you?"

"*What?*" Lelchuk said, all business.

"That's the noise on the street," Mather said.

Ritter stretched his arms and yawned. "How big is this snowstorm?"

"Don't know exactly," Mather said. "The amount's vague, but the word *plenty* is spread around. We've got a buy set up for tomorrow night, but our man's just a mover."

"Who's your connection?" Ritter asked, examining his fingernails.

"Cholly Biggs—you know him?"

Ritter nodded and withdrew a pair of nailclippers from his pocket. "Yeah, I know Cholly. He's handling hard stuff now?"

"No slam, but he's really into coke dealing, it's made him a lot of money," Mather said. He sat down and hoisted his feet onto a gray metal desk across from Lelchuk. "All in all, he's

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pretty discreet about it, too."

"But not careful enough," Ritter said, studiedly trimming a hangnail.

"We've worked hard on this," Patino said, "and getting to him wasn't a bit easy."

"And he's as far up as you've reached?"

Mather and Patino looked at each other, then shrugged. "We didn't get to Max Cosso, if that's what you mean."

"Are you sure Cosso's at the top?"

"Absolutely. We just can't get to him," Patino said.

"No wonder," Ritter deadpanned. "You're not dressed right."

II

"I SWEAR, Darcy, we're nothing but slaves, all of us," Harve said to his dark companion, who had spent the day lugging and hoisting heavy cans until he was too tired to care about anything.

At this hour he usually sat slumped in the seat with his head propped against the window on his rolled-up jacket, sometimes nodding, never more than half awake, occasionally punctuating Harve's monologue with grunts of sour agreement. It was the end of the day and, except for the final dump and the drive back to the operations center, the work was over.

It was Harve's reflective part of the day, the time when he unfettered his thoughts with captive Darcy, and he talked continuously, steering the truck with a professional ease that was almost casual, as though driving were only something he did while talking, instead of the other way around.

"To junk," he said, and shook his head slowly, then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. That wasn't what he had meant to say, or at least it hadn't sounded like the idea he was thinking about and trying to find words for. "It seems like everything turns to junk, we can't move it fast enough."

"Uh-huh."

Harve frowned and, like a man on the verge of a thoughtful discovery, twisted his weathered face in contemplation as he talked. His hair was thinning and turning gray, but his eyebrows were dark and bushy above a Roman nose that twitched every time he blinked.

"Darcy, I swear this country is a machine that sucks in money and spits out junk."

"Yeh."

"It's sharp guys running the machine and catching the money, while clods like us grab what they spill or throw away. I tell you, sometimes I get so mad—"

He saw it then, lying in the middle of the road, its glossy sheen covered by a film of dust but still glistening redly, like a

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shiny toy. They were off the highway, on the flat dirt road to the dump, and Harve stopped the truck and got out, a cloud of dust slowly rising into the still air around him. Darcy opened his eyes and began to stir, but settled back when he saw they had not arrived at the dump.

"Hey, look at this," Harve said, holding the shoe aloft. "Isn't that a beauty?"

Darcy turned his head slightly and gave a cursory look with one sad eye. "Uh-huh."

"Oh, that's a beauty!" Harve insisted. It was a high-heeled pump in glossy patent leather with a delicate little bow on the vamp, and he took out his handkerchief and wiped it carefully.

"It's not been worn at all hardly," he said as he examined the shoe. "It's almost brand new. I swear it's a crime what people throw away. Waste, waste, waste!" He shook his head slowly and got back in the truck, placing the shoe on the seat next to him.

Darcy frowned. "Now what you want with one frigging shoe?"

"Maybe I can locate the other one."

"You crazy?"

"Well, I *hope* to find the mate to it."

Darcy smiled lazily, showing his gold-framed front teeth. "Maybe the scavenger found it."

"I sure hope not," Harve said. "Not that greedy son of a bitch." He released the brake and ground the gears roughly as he pulled away, causing Darcy to open an eye briefly.

"I ain't forgot that wood chair he beat me to," Harve grumbled, his knuckles pale over the steering wheel. "I saw it first, saw the guy unloading it with a bunch of other stuff, and I kept my eye on it till the guy drove away, but that bastard beat me to it. Then had the nerve to try to sell it to me. Claimed it was a genuine Windsor. No, I ain't forgot that."

Darcy mumbled that the scavenger was slick all right.

"But that's a nice-looking shoe," Harve stated, and he relaxed his grip on the wheel. "My daughter's gonna be graduating from junior high in a couple months and she's already started talking about what she's gotta have to wear to the shindig they're throwing." He pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"Darcy, when I went to school there wasn't no junior high, there was just grammar school and high school. And there wasn't parties all the time neither. Kids today just think about spending money, having parties and getting stoned."

"Uh-huh."

"Kids today!" he said, shaking his head and losing the thought about the current generation. "I was raised up not to waste."

He geared down, approaching the dump, and watched for a moment the huge tractor, a Cater-

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pillar, pushing a wall of dirt over the tons of refuse deposited by overloaded citizens and men like Harve in uniformly gray trucks.

"Today people throw away more than I ever had."

"They got to keep that machine running," Darcy muttered.

Waving his arms and pointing with exaggeration, a thin man, wearing dark glasses and a dirty baseball cap, motioned to the spot where he wanted the truck to unload. Harve nodded, turned around and began backing up. "I sure hope somebody found the mate to this shoe," he said.

Darcy grunted and shook himself to a begrudging alertness.

Harve saw the scavenger then, "Black Oscar" as he was called, wiry and dark with sun and grime, with high cheekbones and narrow darting eyes that seemed to cast suspicion wherever they looked. His straight black hair gleamed with oil, and thick shaggy strands raked across the ragged collar of his jacket as he jerked his head in search of usable articles among the waste.

As soon as Harve unloaded, he moved the truck out of the way and parked it beside several other empty trucks. He took the shoe and walked over to the cluster of men, drivers and swampers, who were standing at the edge of the dump, smoking cigarettes and exchanging chaff.

"Whatcha got there?" one of the drivers asked him.

"It's a perfectly good shoe." He held it out for everyone to see. "Practically brand new," he added, turning the shoe so that the viewers could verify his appraisal. "Just right for my girl. I found it on the road in, and I thought maybe one of you guys might've seen the mate to it."

"Yeah, one shoe ain't worth nothing," said Black Oscar, as he strode toward the group, "unless you got a one-legged girl."

The men chuckled uneasily and began to move about from one restless foot to another.

"How many legs has your girl got, Harve?" Black Oscar asked.

"Two," Harve answered flatly and held up the shoe again, ignoring the scavenger. "Any of you guys seen the other one?"

"The *other* one?" Black Oscar bellowed. "You mean she lost her third leg?" He roared in laughter. Some of the men cleared their throats, some giggled nervously. "Ain't no chance of me losing *my* third leg," Oscar declared loudly, grabbing his crotch. "I'm plenty generous with it, but I always get it back."

"I was talking about the shoe," Harve said coldly, aware that he must sound dumb and that everyone would think he was foolish.

Black Oscar grinned at him and Harve wheeled and started away. "*Hey!*" the scavenger called. "I thought you wanted that other shoe."

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Harve stopped. He took a deep breath and turned around. "You got it?"

"Has a dog got fleas?" Black Oscar hooked his dark thumbs in his belt and watched Harve closely through squinted eyes. "What'll you give me for it?"

"Like you said, one shoe ain't no use to nobody."

"That's right. "But it ain't one shoe we're talking about, it's two."

"But it ain't no good to you," Harve reasoned. He tried to laugh but couldn't. "Hell, what're you gonna do with one shoe?"

The scavenger only smiled.

Harve thought for a moment. "You really got it or just trying to start something?"

Black Oscar raised his hands from his belt and turned them outward as if opening his very soul for inspection. "Would I do a thing like that?" he asked, an expression of mock outrage on his face. Then he laughed. "Course I got it. Go look on the front seat."

Harve walked over the Black Oscar's pickup, the bed of which was loaded with the day's harvest, and looked in the open cabin window. The red pump lay on top of a pile of acquisitions—a wire gauge, several paperback books, a rain hat of translucent plastic, an old radio with two missing knobs, a whiskbroom, a steam iron with a frayed cord, all resting on a faded Indian blanket folded neatly into a square.

On the floorboard were a pair of roller skates, a tackle box, a ferruled fishing rod, a pair of rubber hip boots, a stringless ukulele and a piece of weathered board with two good strap hinges attached.

III

"I AIN'T got nothing to trade you for it," Harve said, turning away but motioning toward the truck with a jerk of his arm. "It looks to me like you're doing all right for yourself though."

"I get by."

"Why don't you just let me have the shoe? It ain't no good to you."

Black Oscar showed his tar-stained teeth. "But it is to you. So let's deal."

"I told you, I ain't got nothing to trade."

"I didn't ask for no trade. I asked how much is it worth to you?"

Harve gulped and hunched his shoulders. He looked around at the men as though seeking confirmation that the scavenger's question was absurd. No one said anything, and some of the men looked away as if their minds were on something else.

"I'll get it," Black Oscar said. He jerked the door of the truck open, grabbed the shoe and tossed it into the air playfully. "It's a beauty, ain't it?"

"It'll do," Harve said.

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"A pair a of beautiful shoes like this must cost a lot. I bet a *lot,* don't you?"

Harve shrugged. "I don't know."

"Oh sure," Black Oscar went on. "A whole lot. I bet"—he screwed up his face as though whatever figuring he was doing was painful—"I bet at least fifteen bucks, maybe twenty."

Harve pulled the corners of his mouth down and shook his head.

"Probably more," Black Oscar vowed. "And you know it."

"I swear, one shoe ain't no good to nobody," Harve said, as if he thought the truth of that statement would blot out any further argument.

"That's *right!*" the scavenger beamed. "Now, you ready to do some good old American dealing?"

Harve's nostrils flared and he looked down at the shoe. "It probably ain't yours to sell."

"I *got* it," Black Oscar said, still smiling. "Ain't nobody else's."

"The way I see it," Harve said slowly, "it probably belongs to me more'n it does to you."

The scavenger laughed.

"You took it off city property and I work for the city—you don't."

"I work for *me,*" Black Oscar stated. "I'm what they call an *entrepreneur.* I got an understanding with the city. And I got this shoe. If you want it, you're gonna have to reach a understanding with *me.* The city ain't got nothing to do with it."

Harve scratched his head, then began kneading the back of his neck. "All right," he said finally, "how much you want for it?"

"That's better." Like a salesman displaying his prize item, Black Oscar held the shoe gingerly with his fingertips and inspected it from every angle. "It's a new shoe"—he sniffed the hollow and smiled—"hardly been worn. But since I ain't selling the *pair,* I can't ask a normal full price, can I?"

"Half-price would be a bargain and nobody'd dispute that, but I'll let you have it for just five bucks."

Harve's eyes widened and he opened his mouth but said nothing.

"Just five dollars and you've got yourself a beautiful pair of shoes."

"I ain't gonna give you no five dollars," Harve said through clenched teeth.

"You the one wants the shoes," Black Oscar reminded him. "And you can't espect to get 'em free."

"Like you got everything in your pickup."

"I espect," the scavenger snapped, "to get something besides dirt out of scrounging through everybody's garbage." He looked around at the men. "Just trying to make a living."

Harve cleared his throat and

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said, "A good living, too, I hear. Darcy told me he saw you one Sunday driving around in a big Cadillac."

"You want this shoe"—Black Oscar asked sharply—"or not? If you ain't willing to pay for it, it goes back in my truck, so say so right now."

"It ain't right to charge five dollars for one shoe that ain't no good by itself. I swear it ain't."

"Half of a twenty-dollar bill ain't no good by itself either, but if I had the matching half, I bet you'd be willing to fork over five bucks for it, wouldn't you?" He didn't wait for an answer. "*Sure* you would. Now stop talking dumb and make up your mind: you want this shoe or not?"

"I'm a fair man and I'll give you—just so's you can make some money—I'll give you a dollar for it."

"*A dollar!*" Black Oscar yelled. "I'd set fire to it before I'd sell it for a measly dollar."

"There ain't no market for single shoes."

"You a expert on the shoe market?" the scavenger asked, curling his lip at Harve. "You don't know nothing. You don't know a bargain and you don't know when you're missing a final chance." He held the shoe in front of him. "You want this or not?"

Harve was speechless. The men were silent.

"I guess you don't want it," Black Oscar sneered. He began walking away. "I can always set fire to it."

"Wait a minute," Harve heard himself saying. He felt the sweat in his palms and the bite of his finger nails as he clenched his fists.

Black Oscar stopped and turned sideways, looking over his shoulder at Harve. "I don't see no money."

"Wait a *minute!*" Harve heard himself saying again, only his voice sounded strange and alien. He felt himself moving toward Black Oscar and he saw the little smile on the scavenger's face disappear as he approached.

"You ain't gonna set fire to it," he heard his alien voice say—and then he saw a hand, his own, reach out and grab for the shoe and he heard Black Oscar say, "Oh *no* you don't!" Then the hand that groped for the shoe locked onto the scavenger's arm and another hand, again his own, struck at the grimy head while absently clutching the red pump.

"You *maniac!*" Oscar screamed, tearing free. He hit Harve in the face. Harve didn't feel anything but he saw a dazzling flash of bright colors, followed by a sudden realization that he was sitting on the ground, panting like a dog. The shoe was still in his hand and he whimpered

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when he saw the bow had been ripped off.

"You ain't gonna burn it," he rasped, and spattered himself with specks of blood.

He wiped his mouth with the back of his empty hand, then spat and wiped his mouth again. Black Oscar was ranting that high-heeled pumps weren't even in style and, anyway, he would do whatever he wanted with the shoe.

"You ain't gonna," Harve heard the strange voice say and felt himself rising.

The scavenger grabbed the door of the pickup. "That's *enough,*" he said.

But the hands reached out and the next thing Harve felt was the edge of the pickup's open body smacking his ribs as the scavenger slammed him against the truck.

"I said *that's enough,*" he heard Black Oscar's warning. "Damn *maniac!*"

On top of the mass in the bed of the truck was an arm's length of one-inch pipe and Harve's hand reached out for it, dropping the shoe in among the scavenger's collection.

Harve saw the pipe swinging in front of him, saw Black Oscar's arm dart up, saw the pipe strike the arm, saw the scavenger's mouth spring open, saw the pipe smash into the screaming face, saw the man drop to his knees and totter, blood gushing from his face, saw the pipe rise and disappear into the air, then fly down with incredible speed and crunch into the black skull.

He felt a stunning shock go through his arms and heard a commotion behind him. Someone yelled. He backed up and sat down on the dirt, and was at once surrounded by a flurry of legs.

"He ain't gonna burn it," he heard his weak voice say. He rubbed the palms of his hands into the dirt, but he couldn't feel the ground. "I'm tired," he said.

He heard someone say, "Just sit there, then."

"Oh, sweet Jesus!" He heard a high quavering voice like a wail. "You *did* it, Harve."

He closed his eyes and tried to figure out what he had done. It had something to do with junk, with losing, with the very center of his life, and he knew it was important, but he could not think clearly.

He opened his eyes and looked up and around at the men until he saw Darcy's dark drawn face. "A slave to junk," he said, trying to remember. "What can I do?"

"Nothing to do now," Darcy replied softly. "Nothing at all."

IV

"I JUST SAW Fast Walking

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Jackson downstairs," Lelchuk said.

"Did he stop by to tell us a bedtime story?" Ritter asked, putting on his coat.

"No chat. He's being booked on B and E and attempted burglary."

Ritter frowned. "That doesn't sound right."

"Sounds all right to me. Anything we can nail on him sounds good, and the guys who brought him in say he's nailed tight."

"Who were they?"

"Couple of patrolmen—Ulrich and Davis."

"Well, I was getting ready to leave. Think I'll stop by and say hello."

Ritter went downstairs where the uniformed officers were booking Walter Clemon Jackson, Alias Jack Clemons, aka "Fast Walking" and "Strut" Jackson: male Caucasian, 6′ 4″, 180 pounds, light brown hair, gray-blue eyes, oblique scar on forehead above right eye approximately 3 centimeters long, no tattoos.

One of the officers had just finished fingerprinting him.

"Hello, Fast," Ritter said. "How you doing?"

The man glumly wiped his fingers with a brown paper towel and grunted. He wore a whipcord leisure suit and a gray turtleneck. His legs were unusually long.

"Has he been to our portrait studio yet?"

"Next on the agenda, Lieutenant."

"Well, soon's you finish, bring him into the conversation parlor, will you?" Ritter turned to the other arresting officer, glanced at his nameplate, and led him into a small windowless room furnished with a table and four straight wooden chairs.

Ritter sat down and rested his arms on the table. "What's the story, Davis?"

"Nothing unusual. We got a call on a burglary, found him inside the store."

"Who reported it?"

Davis looked at his notebook. "A man by the name of Halsted, has a business across the street."

"What kind of store was it?"

"Junk."

"You mean a head shop?"

"No, I mean *real* junk. You know, the sort of place sells all kinds of used stuff."

"Like clothes, furniture, what?"

"Yes, sir. Clothes dishes, chairs, lamps, books, magazines—all of it grubby. A junkstore."

"Did you talk to the owner?"

"No sir. We haven't been able to locate him."

The other officer, Ulrich, brought Jackson into the room.

"I'm sorry to hear you've fallen on hard times, Fast," Ritter said. "Things must be grim if you have to steal knickknacks."

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Jason smiled and sat down across from Ritter. "It's a mistake."

"Of course it's a mistake," Ritter said.

"Getting caught always is," Davis added.

Ritter looked at the officer and frowned, then turned back to the prisoner, who had closed his eyes. "But for you this is an unusual mistake—or is breaking and entering your line of work these days?"

"*That's* the mistake part," Jackson said. "But my attorney will explain it to you in legal jargon. By the way, you don't mind if I call him, do you?"

"Not at all. In fact, I insist on it. We'd like to clear up this 'mistake' ourselves." Ritter stood up, waved his hand to indicate that Jackson could leave.

"Thank you, Lieutenant."

"You could probably help, Fast, if you're not in too much of a hurry."

"No hurry." Jackson grinned. He had one long wrinkle in each cheek that was so deep-set it looked like a pleat. "It's just that my attorney is so much more skillful in the art of communication, I think I'll let him handle it."

"Fine," Ritter said. "Well, see you around—don't be a stranger."

Ulrich took Jackson out of the room as Ritter rubbed his jaw and stared at the table.

Davis looked uncomfortable. "Do you want me any more, Lieutenant?"

"Yeah, I want names and addresses. And I want you to keep Jackson in custody as long as you can. Stall, but be subtle. The lawyer'll be waving a writ of mandatus or habeas corpus or turn us loosus, so try not to let him get suspicious. Be cool. Can you be cool?"

Davis nodded. "What's going on?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," Ritter said.

Harve Bushnell stared at the floor of the cell and muttered to himself as he tried to recollect the last few hours. Something bad had happened at the dump. The police had transported him from there to the city jail, where they took his fingerprints, gave him a number, snapped pictures of him and let him call his wife, who shrieked and cried.

Then two men from Homicide talked to him for a long time about Oscar Grabo or Graboski, something like that, who had been murdered. They didn't seem really upset about it, and they spoke very softly, but they kept asking questions as though they thought he could help them.

But he had never heard of any Grabo. The name Oscar sounded familiar, but he couldn't place it. It had something to do with junk. *Junk,* he thought, *junk junk junk junk junk . . .*

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V

"MR. HALSTED? This is Lieutenant Ritter, I'm calling about the attempted burglary you reported . . . Well, it's not real burglary unless something is taken . . . I'd like to come out and talk to you about this, I realize it's nearly midnight and I won't take long . . . Good! See you in a few minutes."

Ritter cradled the telephone and swung his chair around. "Lelchuk, let's go for a ride. I want to look at something."

Lelchuk put on his coat. "Quite honestly, I was thinking about going home."

"Me, too. But I want to look at the place Jackson broke into."

"Why?"

"Because Fast is Max Cosso's runner. Which means he was probably on an errand for Max."

"Why would Max want Jackson to break into a second-hand store?"

"That's what I want to know. And that's why we're going to visit Oscar's Odds and Ends."

The Street was old and most of the stores—pawn-shops, bars, a couple of greasy spoons, liquor stores, poolrooms and porno houses—were run-down and sleazy, relying on gaudy neon or blinking lights for attraction.

When they passed the last drug store, Lelchuk and Ritter felt the street's character quieten but grow more dismal. The dirty garages, soot-streaked warehouses and gas stations were locked up. Only an occasional wino could be seen staggering along the broken sidewalks or passed out in a doorway.

"This is what's known as metropolitan dry rot," Lelchuk said. "It's been this way long's I can remember. Here are the junk names."

"Look at the names," Ritter said. "Trader Vic's, House of Bric-A-Brac, Snooper's Paradise, Bargaintown—and for the classy, *The Emporium.* And there's the one we want—Halsted's Haven."

Lelchuk parked right in front and shut off the lights and opened the car door. "Let's give it a look."

They got out and stood on the sidewalk, taking in the deserted street. "Why would Jackson break into that crapstore?" Lelchuk said, pointing across the street to Oscar's Odds and Ends.

"Who can understand the criminal mind?" As Ritter started to knock on the door to the Haven, a hoarse yell told him it was open. Lelchuk jumped, but Ritter smiled and said, "He told me he'd be here."

They went into the dark store and a large blob seated on their left presumed they were the police and said he was Halsted. Lelchuk took out his identification and waved it in the gloom, and

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Ritter said, "I talked to you on the phone."

"Oh, the Lieutenant. There're light switches to your left, but just flip the one in the middle, okay?"

Lelchuk flicked the center switch and a small flourescent lamp over the door behind him flickered and caught. The illumination was meager, but they could see Halsted plopped in an overstuffed chair in front of the window, holding a can of diet cola and blinking at them.

"I was just sitting here," he said, "looking out of the window."

He was a fat man with a face as round and plan as a dinner plate. Except for a wispy fringe of white hair that trailed from temple to temple like a frazzled wreath, he was bald. He wheezed and moved very slowly, complaining of emphysema, rheumatism and edema.

"Wasn't anybody around, everything was quiet, and I was just sitting here and saw the guy break right in."

Ritter grabbed a folding chair and sat down. "I guess we know why he didn't see you."

Halsted smiled and looked from Ritter to Lelchuk, then out the window. There was a dented coffee table next to his chair and it was strewn with colorful travel folders on Florida.

"You probably think that's strange, but I like sitting in the dark looking out my window. 'Specially when it's quiet. Business is bad, and I only open up in the afternoons any more, and sometimes it's not worth opening up at all.

"Why didn't he tonight?"

HALSTED SHOOK his head. "I don't know. I figure something's the matter. See, he makes a run out to the dump every afternoon, but he's always back by six. That's when his helper gets off, and Moneybags likes to keep the store open, wouldn't want to miss a chance at copping a buck."

"Do you know the name of his helper?"

"Frank something," Halsted wheezed and tried to clear his throat for a while, then gave up. "I don't know his last name, but I do know he's kin to Oz. A cousin I think, so he might have the same name."

"Has anyone been around since the arrest?"

"A tow truck came and took the burglar's car away."

"Anyone else?"

"Only some kids riding around. And one car doing about sixty. But nobody trying to case the joint, if that's what you're after. The only reason I'm still here is because I got all keyed up and I'm just trying to sit it out. Tell you the truth, I got curious when I saw Frank lock up and leave a little after six."

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"The scavenger's been operating there for seven or eight years, and like I said, he's always back at the store by six."

"I see. So you think something happened to him?"

"Something's happened. I don't know what."

Ritter turned to Lelchuk. "Check the morgue."

Halsted gurgled and jerked his head up quickly. "You think he's dead?" Lelchuk went out to the car.

"I don't think anything," Ritter said. "I'm just curious, like you."

"Well, I never thought about the morgue."

"I assume when a person of steady habits breaks the pattern that something is likely to be wrong. And when I assume something's wrong, I always begin with the very worst possibility and work backwards."

"I guess that way things can only get better," Halsted wheezed. "I don't wish him in the morgue, though. It's true he's just about driven me out. I've been thinking about quitting. But I don't wish nobody in the morgue."

"I'm not wishing, Mr. Halsted, just checking." Ritter looked around the store, which was half empty. "Is that why your stock's low?"

"What?"

"You said you were thinking about quitting."

"Yeh. I don't buy hardly anything." He chuckled. "And I don't sell hardly anything, either."

"But your competitor does okay, you say."

"Oz? Okay's not the word. Terrific's the word."

"His place doesn't look any better than yours."

"Looks don't mean anything. I'll bet he's rich, but you'd never know it to look at him. He looks like a bum, but he's really a hustler, a shrewd one, too. And he can fix damn near anything. He takes stuff I wouldn't touch and ticks it up so it works good and looks halfway presentable, too. I tell you, he is rough competition for all of us."

Ritter nodded and leafed through the brochures on Florida. "Going away?"

"Yeh, I'm about ready to quit. Hell, it's mostly habit that keeps me coming down here now, it sure isn't money."

Lelchuk came back in, nodding. "You were right."

Halsted's eyes and mouth opened wide, and in the dim light he was all circles. "Dead?"

"He was killed at the city dump late this afternoon."

"*Killed?*"

"How?" Ritter asked.

"It seems he got in an argument with a driver of a garbage truck. Apparently, the driver just flipped out and bashed in his skull with a lead pipe."

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"Murdered!"

Ritter stood up. "You okay, Mr. Halsted?"

"No—oh, *no!* I never wished for anything like this!"

"I'm sure you didn't."

"I *swear* it! I told you before, I don't wish nobody in the morgue. Oh, I can't sit this out, this is terrible." He took a vial from his pocket and dumped out two capsules, then swallowed them with some of the diet cola.

"We're going across the street now, Mr. Halsted," Ritter said, "to look around. Do you need a ride home or anything?"

"No, my car's in back. Oh me! I never—I *never* wished anything like this—*never!*"

"Just take it easy. We'll check with you before we leave."

"Holy Mary, mother of God—"

As soon as Ritter closed the door behind him, he said very softly, "A freak killing?"

"Seems that way." Lelchuk looked both ways before stepping into the empty street. "The driver evidently went berserk. The argument was over—get this—an item in the trash, a discarded glove or something."

"Weird!"

They stood in front of Oscar's store. The door handle had been twisted off and was lying on the pavement. "Fast sure was clumsy, wasn't he?"

Ritter picked up the handle, broke the police seal and pushed the door open. "Now, with a little luck we might figure out what the bungling burglar was after."

Lelchuk turned on all the overhead lights. "Jee-*sus*, look at this!"

The store was rectangular and the walls were covered with shelves stacked to the ceiling with all kinds of merchandise. There were bulging racks and steel shelving in the middle, and in the back, built into the room, was an office about fifteen by twenty. In the center of the store were a counter and a cash register.

"Toys, clothes, furniture, tools—look there! Sunglasses and razors." Lelchuk shook his head, awed by the inventory. "Everything from kites to wheelbarrows."

Ritter looked through a box of phonograph records. "You like Dave Brubeck?"

"I'm not much for jazz."

"You like irony?"

"Is that a rock group?"

"No, the first album I saw's called *Cold Blood*—isn't that something?" Ritter took out a record. "*Hey*, here's an old Bob Prince album."

Lelchuk exhaled loudly. "What are we looking for?"

"I don't know. I see a lot of stuff, but I don't see anything unusual, do you? Let's try the office."

The door was locked. Ritter looked at the keyhole in the knob, then took a packet of keys and

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metal shims from his pocket and worked one into the lock. He fingered it until the door opened.

"Sesame," he said. "It's magic."

Lelchuk turned on the lights. Unlike the outside store, the office was tidy. There was a small bathroom in the rear on the right, and on the left, next to a large filing cabinet, a bar with a sink and a tiny refrigerator. A counter spanned the side of the building from the bathroom to the front wall of the office.

Two large gray blankets were draped on top of the counter and hung to the floor. Resting on the blankets were electric blenders, toasters, transistor radios, and a color television set, plugged in. Across from the counter was an oak desk with a well-worn judge's chair behind it and two captain's chairs in front.

"Cozy," Ritter said. "See what's underneath the counter."

Lelchuk lifted the blankets and folded them over the blenders and toasters. An IBM typewriter, two more color TVs and several CB sets were exposed. "I'll bet those are hot as a baker's oven," he said.

"Wouldn't surprise me."

"You want me to take down model and make and give it to Robbery?"

Ritter opened the desk drawers, looked through the papers and shook his head. "No, let's browse a little more."

He opened the filing cabinet and looked at the folders and boxes full of cards, invoices, copies of sales slips, cash register tapes, bank statements, income tax reports—all legitimate business records.

He turned to the bar and examined the bottles, then opened the double doors underneath the refrigerator. There were some rags and sponges, a carton of small polyethelene bags, 3 bars of soap, a bottle of laundry bleach and a heavy pasteboard box marked *Commercial Cleanser.*

Ritter began to close the doors, then said "What the hell," pushed the soap and bleach out of the way, and removed the box. The four flaps of the lid were folded together but not sealed. He undid the flaps and lifted out the styrofoam liner. "Eureka!" he said.

Lelchuk looked over his shoulder at the five plastic bags of sparkling white powder. "Is that what I think it is?"

Ritter lifted one of the packages, opened it, took some of the powder and put it on his tongue. "That's mighty good cleanser," he said, smiling.

"It is, isn't it?" Lelchuk said. "God damn, you *are* lucky!"

Ritter took a glass from the bar and filled it with water, then dropped in a pinch of the crystalline powder. It dissolved immediately.

"Looks good," he said, then emptied the glass and poured

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bleach into it. "We don't have a D-ometer, so we'll use"—he read from the side of the bottle—"sodium hypochlorite, five point twenty-five per cent."

He put a spot of powder in the glass and for a few seconds nothing happened. Then it dissolved in milky strands that trailed to the bottom, leaving only a small oily halo on the surface.

Ritter whistled. "That is first rate cleanser. Pure lady."

Lelchuk hefted the bags. "A couple of pounds or so each—probably kilos, don't you imagine?"

"Um-huh." Ritter went into the bathroom, emptied the glass and washed it. When he came back, he replaced the glass on the bar and held out a small hand mirror and a single-edge razor blade. "Look what I found in the head."

"You can find those in every john in town."

"Yeah, but most of the others are for the ritual of grooming." He dumped a small amount of the powder on the face of the mirror and began chopping it with the blade of the razor.

"This is really fine flake—look at *that!*" he said, easily forming separate thin lines on the mirror. He opened his wallet and picked out one of the freshest bills, then rolled it into a tight little tube, and looked up at Lelchuk, who was staring fixedly at him. "Well, do you want to hoot some blow?"

"Are you really—"

Ritter inserted the tube into his right nostril, bent over the mirror and quickly inhaled a line. Then he changed nostrils and sniffed up another line. "*Damn!*" he said, still snuffling. "That is beautiful girl."

Lelchuk glared at him. "Don't you think—"

"Yes. *Think.* Yessirree." He took a pencil from Oscar's desk and began scribbling on the back of an envelope. "Five keys, a little over eleven pounds. Icing this good'll go for at least a hundred a gram.

"Figuring low, that's over $2,800 an ounce, which is $45,000 a pound. Lelchuk, you are looking at half a million—*minimum.* Stepped on twice this stuff could still get fifty bucks a gram, and that means a million dollars on the street."

"What's it doing here?"

"This junkman was obviously the buyer, the middleman. Cosso probably avoids making any direct contact with smugglers."

"*Now* what do we do?"

Ritter replaced the pencil, put the envelope in his pocket with the rolled-up bill, and dumped the other two lines on the mirror back into the large plastic bag. Then he scooped about an ounce into one of the small polyethelene bags, rolled it up tightly and slipped it in his pocket.

"Evidence," Lelchuk said.

But Ritter didn't seem to hear. He resealed the plastic bag,

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returned it to the pasteboard box, put the liner over the cocaine, then refolded the lid and put the box back under the sink. He returned the soap, sponges, bleach, and the carton of sandwich bags.

He closed the doors and stood up, looking around. He took out his handkerchief and dried the glass he had used and replaced it, then put the mirror and razor blade back in the bathroom.

"Okay, let's go."

"*Go!*" Lelchuk's eyes were as big as Halsted's.

"Sure, there's nothing else to do here." Ritter turned off the lights and ushered Lelchuk through the door, making sure it locked behind them. Checking the back of the store, he saw that the solid rear doors were secured with a two-by-six through iron brackets.

"Anybody breaking in there'll make a hell of a noise."

They turned out the lights and closed the front door. "Get another seal out of the car while I take this one off," Ritter said, pulling the torn pieces and putting them in his pocket. He picked up the handle and used it to close the door.

Lelchuk came back with a new seal, which he peeled away from its backing and stuck to the frame and the door in the same position as the other one. "You think he'll do it again, don't you?" he said.

"Cosso's already got at least fifty K invested. That's incentive enough, but the thought of half a million makes the risks look smaller."

"I don't know."

"There are at least five hundred thousand good reasons to try again, and only one reason not to. Max will go with the odds. Furthermore, he's got no idea that we're onto him and no reason to suspect that I can see."

He patted Lelchuk on the shoulder. "Let's get off the street. Put the car in the alley where Halsted keeps his, I'll let you in the back door."

VI

FAST-WALKING Jackson left the police station with a thickset man wearing a tailored suit, gleaming alligator shoes and black-rimmed glasses. His squared-off goatee and mustache were salted with gray, but his hair was black and he combed it straight back. The top of his head was level with Jackson's earlobes.

"I don't *know*," Jackson said again. "I can't figure it out. Nobody was around."

"That you saw."

"I tell you *nobody* was around. Whatta you think I am—*stupid?* You think I'm gonna break in with somebody watching?"

"Why did you go in the front anyway?"

"Aw, gimme some credit, man. I tried the alley first, but the back is *barricaded,* for Chrissake. It

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would take a tank to get in that way. I *had* to go in the front."

"In full view."

"Look, the street was dead, there's no light on Oscar's door, and I was as quiet as possible. It was just dumb luck."

"You're half right."

"Whatta you mean?"

"Get in the car and shut up. I've got to think."

★ ★ ★

"Mr. Halsted, we have reason to believe that another attempt may be made on the store over there, and we'd like to use your place to stand watch."

"You mean like a stake-out?"

"Just a precaution, you understand." Ritter smiled. "After all, it's our job to protect property."

"What makes you think somebody will try again tonight—or I should say, this morning?"

"Call it police instinct. Nothing may come of it, but we feel obligated to make sure. We need your cooperation."

"Sure. It's time I got out of here anyhow. And if anything else happens, I don't want to be around to have it upset me. But I think you're wasting your time, Lieutenant. The law of averages must be against anything else happening to Oscar."

"That's a law we don't enforce."

Halsted grunted. "Okay, the place is yours. Just make sure the doors are locked when you leave."

"We will, and thank you for your assistance." Ritter shook his pudgy hand and plodded with him to the back of the store. "I'll see to it that the department sends you a letter of gratitude. If we had more alert and concerned citizens like you, our jobs would be much easier."

★ ★ ★

"Everything has gone wrong today," Max Cosso said. He was a short man who wore lifts in his shoes and stood very erect. Except for the attorney, who was five eleven, everyone who worked for him was over six feet tall, including his current mistress. He enjoyed bossing a menagerie that towered over him and frequently remarked, "Power is not vested in size."

The attorney caressed his goatee. Jackson said, "The vibes are bad. I don't like the feel of this at all."

Cosso's face turned red. "What do you mean, *vibes?* Is today the thirteenth? Is it a full moon? Does your horoscope say to stay in bed? Don't give me *vibes!*"

The attorney sighed. "He just meant that the occurrences are—"

"I *know* what 'the occurrences' are. Who could've figured Oscar to get himself snuffed by a goddam shoe freak? Or that Fast would work his show in front of an audience? But no matter what goofy things happen, nothing's going to stop me from getting the

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candy. So let's think this out carefully."

"What do you mean?" the attorney asked.

"*What's likely to happen now?*" Max Cosso thundered. He had the deep resonant voice and mobile face of a stage actor, and he moved about and made sweeping gestures as he talked. "I figure tomorrow the cops will probably be all over Oscar's place.

"A guy gets wasted and broken into the same day, even a dumb cop might want to check things out. Christ, I can't take a chance on a badge turning up blankets and opening doors. 'Oh, what have we here?' " he mimicked. " 'It looks like ten or twelve pounds of happy dust.' "

"We don't know that the police have related the two events," the attorney said calmly. "My impression is that they have not."

"Your *vibes?*"

"No. The arresting officers don't even know Oscar's last name. Therefore—"

"Therefore they'll be sure to drop by the first thing tomorrow, wouldn't you think? At which time, they'll find out Oscar got himself dumped, and while *we* know there's no connection, *they* don't—so what're they likely to think?"

The attorney took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "I can't speculate that they would suspect anything."

"Okay, forget it. Let's say that's not in the tea leaves. But with Oscar cold, what happens to the store—and to my freeze?"

"I'll get appointed as executor and handle everything. Just be patient."

"I've got a lot of money in this," Cosso said through clenched teeth, "and right now I got nothing that says I won't lose it all and forfeit one hell of a return to boot."

"All the more reason to proceed with caution."

"And all the more reason to get the golden egg out of the store window and into my nest where I can hatch it. I can't take a chance on having the fuzz find it. The way I figure it, every hour increases their chances—which means mine get worse."

"Not necessarily. As a matter of fact, I think the more time that passes, the safer we'll be."

"How do you figure?"

"When the police discover that the owner was killed on the same day his store was broken into, they will probably make a joke of it. You know, 'It just wasn't his day'—and forget it. After all, the killing was a bizarre happening and should in no way alert suspicion."

"But what if it does?"

The attorney shrugged. "That's simply not likely. If you can just be patient, I will assume executorship and the goods will be at my disposal."

Cosso glared at the attorney. "I

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don't like it," he said.

VII

LELCHUK YAWNED for the third time. "I still think we're just wasting a night."

"You sure are sleepy. Want some zip?"

"No. And I don't see how you can be so casual about using that stuff at the same time you're hoping to make a bust."

"I'll tell you," Ritter said. "With the exception of skag, I got nothing against dope, and I didn't want to work the Narc division, but my bars were contingent on it. There wasn't room for another Lieutenant in Robbery or Homicide.

"Vice is full of volunteers and Bunco didn't need me, so I was promoted with the understanding that I'd go to Narcotics. Hell, it must be obvious that I've got a scunner for the job and have put very little into it. I'm riding on my reputation. After nine months, I can't show the Captain an arrest record that's worth looking at."

"You mean you're getting pressure?"

"The Chief wants collars. He reads those monthly reports like the Dow-Jones averages. Do you have any idea how happy he'll be if we bring in eleven pounds of superfine C *and* Cosso?"

"I can see your name in the papers now."

"Yours, too. *Officers Net million Dollar Drug Cache In Early Morning Raid.* Like it or not, that kind of publicity is good for you."

"So it's not the dope that matters to you?"

"Not in the sense that I have a mission to stop trafficking. But a big bust will make our stock go up in the Chief's eyes and he'll forget about the other months. We can say we've been working on this for a long time. When things get quiet again, I'll put in for a transfer."

"Mather and Patino are left out."

Ritter pulled the corners of his mouth down and shrugged. "Those guys get their rocks playing Undercover Cop. You know, not only do I disapprove of that kind of police work, I think it should be against the law."

"You have a strange code of ethics."

"I just believe in playing fair."

* * *

The attorney locked his cobalt Imperial, sprinted up the steps of Le Maison de Massage, the most expensive *parloir* in the city, and twenty minutes later he lay on his stomach as two young women kneaded his thick body. They were all naked.

"You're all tight," the blonde said, working her hands over his back and shoulders. "Your trapezius won't turn loose."

"It's been a tense day."

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"Sure feels like it," the blonde said. The other girl, a glum brunette with half-closed eyes, chopped at the backs of his thighs. "You're stiff all over."

"Not yet."

"Let's get you loosened up, hon. We want to take *all* the tension out of you."

The attorney turned over on his back. "Maybe you ought to do first things first," he said.

★ ☆ ☆

Lelchuk wandered around the dark store, looking for a cot. "What a way to spend a night," he complained.

" 'What's New?' That was the name of the album," Ritter said, looking out the window from Halsted's overstuffed chair. Bob Prince and his Orchestra. 'What's New?' I saw a Buck Clayton record, too."

"Never heard of him."

"What do you listen to?"

"Right now I'm listening to my better judgment, which says 'Get out of here and go home.' "

"The day's been good," Ritter said. "I feel like a gambler on a run, I feel lucky."

"And like the gambler, you don't know when to quit." Lelchuk sat down in the folding chair.

"We'll see. It's almost four, this is the deadest part of the night. You know, that album reminded me of something that happened before I got on the force. I was working for a private operator in Hollywood, and one day this pretty dude comes in to buy a little recognition."

"Recognition?"

"Yeah. He was an actor—feature player and bit parts, not big roles, but he thought he was star material. All he needed was a break, he said, thought if he could get a good part in a certain picture, it would be his ticket to the top."

"That's what everybody thinks."

"He had managed to get a dinner lined up at the Brown Derby with some big shots, and he wanted to impress them without coming on too heavy himself. My job was to 'recognize' him. I was supposed to go over and say 'Excuse me, but aren't you so-and-so?' and he would nod and I'd say 'I saw you in such-and-such and you were terrific, saved the movie.'

"He would thank me, I would compliment him again on his acting ability and leave. Nothing to it. For this I would get twenty bucks plus a meal for me and my date."

"What's this got to do with the album?"

"As it turned out, the Derby was packed with pretty types and I couldn't spot my boy. He wasn't going to notice me, see, because he wanted everything to appear 'natural.'

"After I finished eating, I

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looked at the note in my pocket with the guy's name and the name of the flick I was supposed to mention on it. I scoped the place again, crossed my fingers, and took a chance. 'Pardon me,' I said to a young guy at a table with some producer-looking types, 'but aren't you so-and-so?'

"Well, if looks could freeze I'd've been a six-foot ice cube. 'I most certainly am *not,*' this guy says like he was denying a buggery charge. I grabbed my date and took off, nothing else to do."

"You blew it, huh?" Lelchuk smiled.

"Nah, my man wasn't even there. At the last minute, one of the directors opted to go slumming, said he'd found a leather bar with a lot of rough trade. This guy's a glitter freak today, I saw his picture in *Time* magazine."

"Did he get the part?"

"Turned out he and the director had what they called 'affinity' and what we call something else. He got the job all right—the picture was called *What's New?*—and I got an extra ten he was so happy. He even apologized for my inconvenience."

"Anyone else would've got fired."

"Been lucky all my life." Ritter stretched his arms and grinned. "I don't see how a man could be a cop without luck."

Lelchuk frowned. Since he didn't think of himself as lucky, he always felt that Ritter was putting him down. "It can't take the place of hard work," he said. "The job's got to be done, and if everybody sat around waiting for Lady Luck to—"

"Oh *sure,*" Ritter said. "Everybody's got to work, and having a talent—a feel for it—makes the grind easier, too. But without luck the job's just a—"

He slipped out of the chair quickly and hit the floor. Lelchuk moved behind the door and reached for his Police Special.

"No lights on," Ritter said, watching the silver Continental glide slowly past. "Damn near drove up on us."

The car continued through the next block, then turned around and came back just as slowly. Ritter unfolded the bag and sniffed up a pinch from his index finger, then did the other nostril.

The car stopped in front of Oscar's store. Max Cosso and Fast Walking Jackson got out and stood at the entrance. The car eased away.

"Look at that Cosso, will you?" Ritter said softly. "He stands so upright, it looks like he's leaning backward. Isn't it odd for a guy to look so straight and be so crooked?"

"He's sure a natty dude. You know the driver?"

"Maynard Stiles, otherwise known as Moose Maynard. He used to wrestle, they called him 'Mean Maynard the Mountain

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Man'. Two hundred and fifty pounds of malice. Okay, they're inside, Moose's taking a right at the corner which means he's going down the alley. They'll be using the back door. Come on."

They went out the back and while Lelchuk examined his Smith and Wesson .38 in the moonlight, Ritter called for back-up.

"Which end of the alley do you want?" Lelchuk asked.

"Moose went in the north side, so we better do the same, I don't want to be facing the car. If he flashes his headlights we'll be blinded."

They moved quietly out of the alley and across the street. Ritter withdrew his Colt Python and kissed the five-inch barrel. Slowly they worked their way to the alley entrance, then stood with their backs to the brick wall.

"Wait till you hear them come out of the store," Ritter whispered, "then you take the other side."

Lelchuk was breathing rapidly.

"You're going to hyperventilate," Ritter said. "Take it easy, breathe deep."

VIII

THE BACK DOOR opened and footsteps sounded in the alley. Ritter nudged Lelchuk and he darted across the alley.

"*Police!*" Ritter shouted as he stepped into the entrance, gun locked in front of him. Cosso stood by the car's rear door, which was open, and Jackson crouched behind him.

"*Hands on the roof!*" Ritter yelled. "Get out of the car, Moose, and point 'em to the sky."

The left front door opened and a huge arm went up into the air. Then the bulky torso twisted and a flash exploded from Moose's right hand and Lelchuk fell backward, sending a bullet into the side of the building.

Cosso and Jackson lunged into the car and Ritter fired two slugs into the trunk. Moose gunned the engine and Ritter shot again, shattering the outside rear-view mirror. The car swerved as Ritter blasted the back window. Suddenly the horn blared and the car rammed into a trash bin near the mouth of the alley and stopped, horn screaming. The front door on the passenger side sprang open, but Ritter saw no other movement.

He glanced at Lelchuk, who did not move, then inched his way down the alley. "*Cosso!*" he yelled, trying to make himself heard over the drone of the horn. The rear window bore a jagged hole from which radiated long cracks intersected by other cracks, making a design like a spider's web.

Ritter moved cautiously around the side of the car, saw Moose's large frame slumped against the steering wheel and Cosso's small body huddled on the floor in the rear, but no sign of Jackson.

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"I don't have a gun," Cosso whimpered. "I don't have a gun."

Ritter jerked the door open. "*Move!*" he said, and Cosso scrambled out. Ritter shoved him against the car, cracking his chin against the roof, and patted him down. "Okay, put your hands behind you."

Ritter cuffed him quickly and made him lie face down in the dirty alley. Then he heard, above the din of the horn, the wailing sirens of the patrol cars and he put his gun away, took out his badge and hooked it to the breast pocket of his coat.

One car, red lights flashing, squealed to a stop in front of him, blocking the alley. Another roared up behind him. The patrolmen darted toward him with their weapons drawn.

"It's all over," Ritter said. He went around the car, reached in the driver's window and pulled Moose off the sterring wheel. The horn stopped. Blood oozed down the back of the wrestler's neck where the bullet had entered at the base of his skull. Ritter pushed him over in the seat, not wanting to see his face. There was no gun in the car.

"One got away," Ritter said, "and he's got a biscuit."

"*This guy's dead,*" a young officer yelled from the far end of the alley.

"Hear that, Cosso?" Ritter snapped as two patrolmen lifted the man to his feet. "You're facing a murder rap."

Cosso was sweating, his clothes were soiled, and he no longer looked dapper. "I didn't shoot him and you know it."

"Doesn't matter who pulled the trigger, you were all in commission of a felony when it happened. Multiple felonies, to make it tight. You've got murder one wrapped around you like a straightjacket, and that's a lot of weight."

Ritter took the pasteboard box out of the car and dropped it at Cosso's feet. "Not to mention five keys of snow, which is good for ten to twenty calendars by itself." He opened the box to show the contents to the officers. "Take him down. I'll be along in a little while."

Ritter trudged down the alley. Lelchuk lay on his back, arms spread, neck drenched with blood, mouth and eyes open. The bullet had hit him in the throat just above the clavicle, and must have broken his neck, Ritter figured, but did not examine him.

He had no desire to turn Lelchuk over, no curiosity about specific damage to the cervical vertebrae, no interest in the caliber or make of the weapon that killed him, no use for any fact beyond the all-important one.

"Get a blanket," he said to the rookie cop hovering behind him, "and cover him, *goddammit!*" He put his hand on Lelchuk's still chest. "No luck," he said. "No luck at all."

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★ ★ ★

In the afternoon of the next day, less than 36 hours later, Ritter stood uncomfortably in a charcoal grey suit and dark Charvet tie, with a dozen other somber plain-clothes officers and watched Lelchuk's casket descend slowly into the ground.

Behind them, ranks of uniformed policemen stood rigidly and saluted. Lelchuk's ex-wife and two sons, nine and eleven, were crying as they dropped handfuls of dirt into the grave.

Ritter turned to walk away alone, but Mather and Patino, neatly groomed and wearing navy blue suits with muted stripes, fell in beside him. When they were out of earshot of the others, Mather said, looking straight ahead, "We read the report but still can't figure why we weren't in on the grab. This was our case."

"There just wasn't time. But I didn't shut you out, I gave you guys credit."

"For information."

"That's all you provided. Remember, you never touched Cosso, and I don't think you ever would've."

"Are you sure you weren't flying a glory trip?" Patino asked.

"Is that what you think?"

"Looks that way," Mather said. "Especially when you couldn't even wait for the back-up."

"*I* could wait!—I'm a patient man!—but Cosso was in a hurry. We had to move, no choice."

"Hell, two units were on the scene within three or four minutes after you called."

"Seemed longer to me, but still I didn't *know*. Sometimes those guys dog it." Ritter sighed heavily and looked back at the dispersing mourners as a shirtless black man on a tractor lowered his blade and pushed dirt into Lelchuk's grave.

Patino said, "Even if you'd let the car out of the alley, you had a make, you could've shagged them on the street, couldn't you?"

Ritter looked at him. "Maybe. But we were on foot, we couldn't *run* after the car. And you know as well as I do—or you should—that if they got out of sight, we might never've seen that dope again.

"They could've had another car stashed close by—anything. I couldn't risk it. Look, I know you guys're upset, but I don't like Monday morning quarterbacking, not from the second string."

"Maybe if we'd been in the game . . ." Mather let his sentence die, and they walked across the cemetery in grim silence. They came to a fresh grave spotted with flowers and semi-circled by standing wreaths, and Ritter stooped to read the card in the metal stand at the foot of the grave—*Oscar Grabowski.*

"What is it?" Patino asked. "Somebody you know?"

"In a way," Ritter answered.

"Jesus Christ!" Mather said, and walked away.

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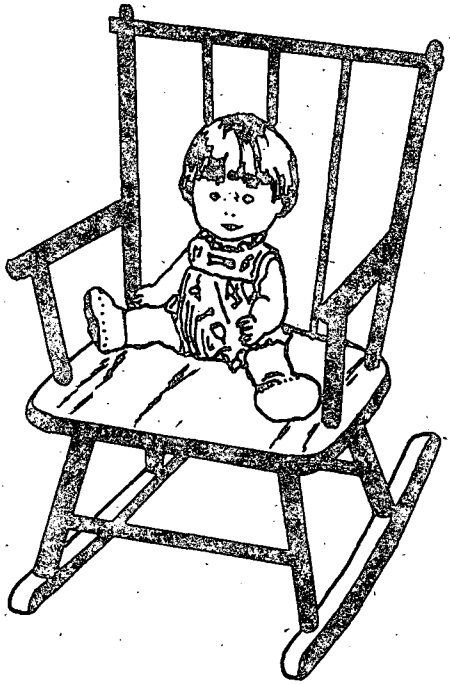
SMUGGLER'S TOY



by JACK LEAVITT

Aaron Demas Played the Heel while Bringing the Doll in—but Who Could Blame Him?

A PALE GREEN gown, doll-size, lay on the only chair in the workroom, sharing the cushion with a pair of blue plastic eyes.

"Green and blue?" Aaron Demas asked. "Couldn't you find a better combination?" Massively built, in his late twenties, he stood beside the chair and frowned. On the other side of the chair, a steel hook protruded waist high from the wall.

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For the third time in the past few minutes, Aaron looked at his wrist watch. It read 9:36 a.m., Berlin time. Less than three hours before his flight from Tempelhof.

Near the work table, under a flourescent light, Carl Hoffman spoke quickly, with exasperation rather than anger. "On short notice, be grateful for any help. If we could wait for the green eyes, we'd wait. But San Francisco needs the goods."

"Next month would be safer."

"From what we hear, Customs is gearing up for a long siege. With nerve, we'll slip by early while they're shorthanded. You're just tense because we're trying a new delivery system."

"You'll read about the arrest. Probably in some Brazilian cafe. Me? I'll be right there."

"Don't worry, Aaron. My flight lands in San Francisco seven hours after yours. I hate waiting for my share." Hoffman patted the naked rump of the headless doll he was holding upside down. The glistening pink buttocks mimicked his own baldness. "Before you know it, we'll be sitting around a swimming pool, celebrating."

Aaron sucked air through his dry lips. "Stupid doll."

"You'll be fine. Remember, what's new to us is even newer to them."

The overhead light threw shadows across the younger man's face, darkening his eyes and lips, accentuating his facial folds. "They've got informers."

Looking up at Aaron, Hoffman sighed. "You want to be safe, my friend, work for *them*. You want spending money, stick with *us*."

"Hurry up, please. I know the arguments." Aaron began again to look at his wrist watch, pushed his hand down and swiped the air. "Crazy idea."

Angry, Hoffman spun the doll right side up. He twisted one arm and jerked it loose. Calming himself, he set the arm on the worktable, between the doll's eyeless head and a sealed metal cannister. Gently, he reached through the doll's open neck and loosened a rubber band in its body cavity. The other arm and both legs slid free of the torso. Hoffman laid the limbs side by side in front of him, next to the trunk.

"Before I broke my wrist I wanted to be a surgeon." The thin, older man grimaced at the past.

"Carl, I'll never have your patience," Aaron said. "Thanks for trying to make things easy."

"Why not? Only a fool would break up the team."

From a cardboard box, Hoffman withdrew a silken cloth which looked like a doll's sleeve sewn tightly on three sides, with one narrow end open. Hoffman tugged

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the grey material to make sure the threads held, then slipped his thumb and forefinger into the open end to spread it apart.

"Bah!" he fussed. "Backwards. You're not the only jumpy one."

Putting the cloth down, he pried off the canister's lid. *"There!"* He nodded at the brownish powder inside the container. "Now I'm ready."

With a measuring spoon he dipped into the powder, careful not to swirl it into the air. Slowly, cautiously, he poured the crystalline mix into the cloth sleeve. After each scoop, he pinched the cloth shut and shook it to pack the powder more tightly.

When the sleeve was nearly full, Hoffman planted the spoon upright in the canister. He reached for a needle and thread, folded down the sleeve's open mouth and double-stitched the cloth.

"Solid!"

The packed sleeve, slightly bent, slipped neatly inside the doll's hollow arm.

"Poor thing's putting on weight," Hoffman twinkled.

One by one, he filled other cloth packets and inserted them into the doll's remaining limbs and trunk. After setting the eyes in place, he tucked a final sleeve inside the head. "Like stuffing a Thanksgiving turkey."

Short thick rubber bands fitted on hooks in the torso, internal muscles to hold the arms and legs in place. Only the head needed positioning for the doll to be complete, though sexlessly nude.

"Move away, Aaron. Over there please." Hoffman gestured.

Aaron stepped from the chair towards a small window, while Hoffman walked over to the hook embedded in the wall.

"My third hand," Hoffman explained. He maneuvered the headless doll's open neck over the hook. The moment he felt elastic resistance he tugged. Stretching out from the neck was a rubber band loop.

"Here, yes . . . and good." He fingered the loop onto a swivel hook inside the doll's head. The head settled in place. The doll was whole again, appearing as innocent as ever.

Hoffman brushed the green gown, then slipped it over the doll's head and buttoned it along the back. "Bon voyage, both of you." He thrust the toy at Aaron.

"No box?"

"Of course not. You're just a nice fellow bringing an old-fashioned doll back to his niece."

The partners shook hands. When Aaron walked into the street, a large man clutching a two-foot-tall, curly-haired doll, Hoffman waved farewell encouragement. As soon as Aaron drove past the first street corner in his rented car, Hoffman began counting. At 1:50, he reached for

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his telephone.

"American Embassy?" he asked. "May I make some confidential arrangements with your Customs service? That bonus you offer . . ."

II

A LOW RAIL marked off the passenger seating area for Gate 36 at Tempelhof. Dark-blue lounge chairs formed a series of concentric arcs that faced the runways, where departing jetliners streamed aloft. Tourists going home occupied nearly every seat. Of all ages, they waited quietly for their vacations to end.

Outside the rail, Aaron joined the line at the check-in counter. As he held the doll to his side, partially covered by his topcoat, he scanned the group of fellow passengers. To most people he gave only a glance but he noticed a six-year-old girl who was seated sideways in an aisle chair, jiggling a large jack-in-the-box and looking wonderingly around the concourse. Under windswept brown hair, her face appeared friendly and mischievious. Bright red letters branded her toy as *Peter Pop-up*.

The man seated beside her tapped her shoulder and pointed at Aaron. When she saw the doll, her eyes widened. Aaron scowled and shifted the doll to his other side, away from her. She looked off, sneaked a look back and turned away quickly when she saw how irritated he appeared. Even across the room his eyes blazed anger at her. *"Keep away!"* was their message.

Only when Aaron reached the head of the line did he interrupt his silent warning. "Starboard side, non-smoking," he told the uniformed attendant at the counter. While the airline receptionist pasted seat number 23K on his boarding pass, Aaron heard a voice call, "Daddy." The girl seamed ready to cry.

Her father, a sandy-haired man in his late thirties, held her close. "Honey," he said in a deliberately loud voice, "there are some grown-ups who are mean. Maybe, though, he's a nice man who's tired."

"He should take a nap."

Loudspeakers interrupted them. In German, French and English, the dispatcher announced, "Flight 414 now ready at Gate 36. Please have your boarding passes in hand."

From all directions, the passengers congealed into a slow-moving line. Aaron's pace from the counter area brought him alongside the man and his daughter as they moved towards the enclosed ramp onto the aircraft. Three abreast, they edged forward.

"Hi," the father smiled. "I'm Arthur Lackner and this is my daughter Jenny."

"Jennifer!"

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"*Jennifer!* She's not going to break anything but she loves your doll. It has that old-fashioned charm."

Aaron's mouth twitched. His free hand lumped into a fist that he held next to the doll, protecting it. Eyes darting sideways to see if anyone was watching him, he snapped, "Keep her back. She's a pest."

Open mouthed, Lackner stopped. The crowd nudged him forward. He tugged Jenny closer to him. Though the crowd surrendered no room, he squeezed as far as he could from Aaron.

"You're sick, mister. If a little girl thinks a doll is nice . . . "

Aaron stalked onto the ramp. "Buy her one, you cheap clod. Leave me alone."

Passengers stared. A blonde stewardess bit her lip. The airport hum sounded ominous, a mechanical whine.

"He's sick, Jennifer. He's sick." Lackner kissed his daughter's forehead.

"Will the pilot take his temperature?" Jennifer asked.

The stewardess laughed. The passengers joined in but drifted far from Aaron, who now walked alone, hugging the doll. Its face remained lovable.

When Aaron stepped inside the plane, out of hearing, the stewardess whispered to Lackner, "Is your daughter all right, sir?"

"She's fine. But that guy, whoever he is—watch out! He acts like the doll's stuffed with diamonds."

"So many passengers become tense before takeoff. It's only nerves."

"He's hiding something," Lackner insisted. "A maniac or a crook."

Absent-mindedly, the stewardess urged Lackner and Jennifer into the hatchway. "Straight through and to your right." She nibbled on her ball-point pen, hoping for a calm flight. Why upset the chief cabin attendant with minor squabbles he expected her to solve?

III

ON SCHEDULE descending from 32,000 feet, Flight 414 entered into a holding pattern over San Francisco. When the stewardess paced through the aisle, retrieving the airline's blankets and pillows, Lackner said, "Thanks for a good trip."

"We hope to see you again, sir," She answered. "And your daughter, especially." The uniformed woman looked fondly at the small, sleeping passenger, head resting on her father's arm.

Lackner cinched Jennifer's seat belt tight. The youngster remained asleep. "All flight long I've been watching our friend in Seat 23K."

The stewardess nodded, unwilling to say anything. Wisps of blonde hair strayed from under

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her dark cap.

"He's been ugly to everyone. You must've noticed."

"Yes," the stewardess hesitated. "He was rude, wasn't he?"

"And even Jenny has more sense. She let me store her jack-in-the-box in the overhead rack, but that loudmouth kept the doll in his lap all trip. It isn't natural."

The stewardess drummed her fingers on the arm rest.

"We don't like to inconvenience passengers. It's a holiday and they deserve some leeway."

"A doll like that wouldn't even cost $20.00. Ah, well. You know he took it to the men's room? Almost punched someone who laughed." Lackner tightened his own seat belt. "If he's not afraid of something, I'll pay his fare."

A slim, hesitant figure, the stewardess spoke almost to herself. "It really is the chief cabin attendant's responsibility, not mine." PIllows in her arms, she walked forward to the chief's station.

"I like her," a small voice said.

"Why, Jenny, I thought you were asleep," her father teased.

"I was until you were talking. Now I'm not. I hate him, too." With big jaw movements she began chewing a stick of gum.

A slight thump, and the plane landed, jet engines reversing. When the taxiing ended, the *Fasten Seat Belt* lights went dark. Passengers stretched to the overhead racks. Lackner handed Jennifer her Peter Pop-Up and reached for his jacket and flight bag. Jennifer scooted past him into the aisle.

"Mister, Mister," Jennifer called. People smiled and let her pass. Her face was fatigued but her eyes were alight. *"Mister!"* she called again.

Aaron ignored her. He heard the childish yell, knew it was meant for him and hurried unheedingly toward the debarkation ramp. *Thunk!* A chewing gum wrapper hit his head. He spun around, fist cocked. *"Damn* you!"

"Boo!" shrieked Jennifer. She triggered a button on her toy. *"Boo!"* Peter Pop-Up exploded with a woosh. Bright orange and blue, clown headed, with waggling tongue, the jack-in-the-box streaked towards Aaron. Frightened, Aaron jumped back. He bumped into a seat rest, skidded on a plastic cup. The doll dropped on the floor. It bounced once and lay on its face, green gown pulled up over its bare buttocks.

"Good," Jennifer announced. "You were mean." She marched back to her pale father.

Dropping to his hands and knees, Aaron seized the doll. Intact, unbroken. Still in a crouch, the doll in his arms, he bulled forward, ignoring Jennifer, thrusting passengers aside. Out the hatchway and down the ramp he

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dodged—first one to the Customs counter.

AT A POOLSIDE table, Carl Hoffman sipped a gin and tonic. Comfortable in an aloha shirt, swim trunks and sandals, he felt relaxed. Free, rich and healthy in a Marin County home, north of San Francisco. Three quarters of his drink remained, compared to barely a third of tequilla collins that sat across from him on the redwood table.

"Drink up," he warned himself, "before the ice cubes melt." He hiked his glass.

A heavy finger tapped his right shoulder. He spun to the right. No one there! To the *left,* then—but before he could whirl something gouged into his backbone. Aaron Demas stood there, holding his topcoat. The doll's hand protruded from under the folds.

"Have a good flight, Carl?"

"Quiet," Hoffman stood up, beyond arm's reach. "And you?"

Exhausted Aaron stared at his thinner, older partner. "I'm here."

"The doll?"

Aaron flipped his coat onto a webbed chair. All he now held was the doll's arm, detached, alone. "The rest of the doll's in my car. You'll have to reassemble it yourself. I don't have a hook for a third hand."

"I knew you'd get here, Aaron."

"Thanks to your encouragement, Carl."

Hoffman sucked at his drink. "Tell me! What happened."

"Customs stopped me," Aaron laughed. "Five agents." He sat down and motioned for Hoffman to take the other chair. Hoffman sat.

"They push you around?" Hoffman looked frightened, vicariously feeling the pain.

"A little. That's stuff I can take, unlike you. It's the waiting that kills me." Aaron held up the unatteneded tequilla collins. When Hoffman nodded, Aaron gulped it down.

"Five agents," Aaron repeated. "They hardly had anyone left for the other passengers." Looking around, seeing no one, Aaron continued. "They started tearing up that doll. 'More than two kilos,' some hollered. They figured themselves for heroes. 'My niece is 14 years old and likes big, heavy dolls,' I told them. 'I think you officers have made a terrible mistake. I'd like to call my lawyer.' One of them kicked me. Then they tested the stuff. Bubble bath crystals."

Hoffman giggled. "They let you go?"

"Not for an hour. They made a dozen phone calls. Finally they said, 'Shove off.' What else could they do?"

An arc of water erupted from the pool. *"Hey!"* both men shouted at the drenching.

"Customs should have held you

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for mumbling from behind," a voice boomed out. "You're sick, Aaron, sick." Sandy-haired and laughing, Arthur Lackner pulled himself from the water, where he had surfaced. "Auld lang syne. While Jenny and I snuck by with an ace or two of diamonds, Customs was frantic about a pile of smack. Evil stuff, I hear. Clogs the bathtub drains."

"Are the diamonds safe?"

"Safe at the dealers, Aaron. I dropped them off after I put Jenny to bed. A good kid. You should meet her someday."

Shaking his head, Aaron said, "The trip was enough."

"C'mon, we needed a Plan B. Customs thought Carl's phone was a crank number . . . "

Hoffman protested. "Be fair, Arthur. I couldn't give too many details."

"Anyway," Lackner continued, "I got the stewardess worked up about that big, ugly man who frightened my daughter. We got the diversion we needed."

Aaron looked sour. "I could've thrown your kid in the bay. Shooting that toy in my face!"

"Peter Pop-Up?" Arthur chuckled. "Don't blame Jenny. She deserved to get even with you. How could she know she was bouncing around $240,000 worth of diamonds." Smiling, Arthur played catch with the doll's arm. "I wonder if she'll tell her class about the man who loves dolls and hates children."

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INSPECTOR BEWARE

by RUSS CONE

Dobler's Dashing Widow Wanted His Killer Caught—so She Turned to the Press for Help.

IT WAS JUST three paragraphs in the morning *Post,* headlined by INSPECTOR DIES IN FALL.

But Charles Aloysius Hare muttered, *"Damn!"* when he read it, because Chuck Hare, City Hall reporter for the afternoon *Bulletin,* happened to know the inspector slightly. Hare had talked to him on some story—maybe the scaffold collapse at Civic Auditorium? It didn't matter.

Hare knew the man, a large, paunchy, middle-aged German named Peter Dobler. Like so many city inspectors, Dobler was a former plumber who got lucky with a political connection and landed one of those juicy, all-season employments with city government a few years earlier.

Dobler's body had been discovered on the nineteenth level of the Blackburn Building, apparently having slipped and fallen from the open work on the twenty-fifth story, where construction was in progress. The structure would be 45 stories when completed, according to plans authorized by the Board of Supervisors last year when the Board had voted, after bitter debate, to close an adjoining alley to permit higher building.

The door of the second floor press room flew open and lanky Dirk Wells, the *Post* reporter, swung into the room with a loud, "Everybody up! I say, everybody up!"

"Easy for you to say," Chuck Hare shouted back at his colleague. "You're not sitting down."

Dirk Wells busied himself momentarily in the *Post* cubicle, a 6-by-8 foot, glass partitioned affair closest to the entrance of Room 238.

Then he strode around to peer at Hare, who stood before the *Bulletin* desk, one foot on his swivel chair, flipping pages of the *Post* on the desk before him.

"So they ran your lead on the dog-do story," Hare said without looking up.

Wells leaned into the *Bulletin* cubicle, grinning. "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Lead, second graf, third graf. In fact, Chuck, the whole damned story is there. Not a word, not a comma changed."

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Hare turned to his young colleague and grinned. "No kidding? What *happened?* The night editor die?"

Dirk spun back into the open central area of the press room and threw himself into one of the frayed, overstuffed chairs by the card table. He held his hands aloft, snapping his fingers and humming.

"It was a good story," Hare conceded, "except you forgot to mention the old lady who pulled the kitten out of her knitting bag and shouted, 'Keep cats, not dogs!'"

Hare sat up. *"That's* not in there?"

The Oakland *Blade's* Alice Spencer chose that moment to arrive, spinning into the room like Loretta Young and sashaying without comment straight to the tiny washroom in the rear, where the coffeepot was kept. Seconds later, Alice reappeared with a steaming cup and eased herself into a vacant chair by the card table.

"Why didn't you mention the woman with the kitten?" Alice asked.

The wall telephone by Chuck's desk rang.

"Morning, Fred," Chuck said into it. "That's right. Finance Committee this afternoon and I except we'll be seeing the Major this morning. Yeah. Yeah. Oh?" Chuck turned to catch Dirk's eye. "You liked the bit about the lady with the kitten? So did I."

When he hung up Dirk bent over in his chair, holding his head with his hands.

George slowly pushed open the press room door, peered in, then, carefully stepped just inside, letting the door swing closed. George, a portly, balding man in his late sixties, wore an ill-fitting yellow black-checked suit and plastic bow tie and visited the room almost daily.

He announced ponderously, "I have written the Governor. I'm tired of the courts. I'm going straight to the top this time. That land is mine and I mean to get justice. *Here!*"

He strolled on thin, slipper-soft soles among them, distributing Xeroxed copies of his letter. When he had finished, he stepped back to the spot near the door and stood there, silent, a plaintive smile on his round face.

Chuck glanced at the latest message, then said, "Thank you, George."

The big man turned and quietly slipped out of the room, a clink in the kaleidoscope of City Hall characters.

"What is it he wants? I've forgotten," Alice said.

"You know that hill where the Bay Bridge is anchored? His family owned that land. I once checked it out. They did, all right. But George claims it was taken from them illegally. Some shifty legal maneuver. As you can see

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by his letter, it's not too clear."

Chuck's phone rang again. He grabbed it irritably.

"Yeah, Fred?"

"Charles Hare?" the voice was liquid, deep and female, sending an infrequently felt pleasant tingle through the lean, fortyish frame of Charles A. Hare.

"*Aha!* It's not Fred," Chuck said. "Yes, yes. This is me, I mean, this is he."

"Mister Hare, my name is Julia Dobler. My husband was Peter Dobler, a building inspector for the city," she explained without emotion.

Chuck said, "Oh, yes. I knew him. I was very sorry to read about the accident."

"Mister Hare, that was no accident," she said.

Chuck slipped into his chair near the phone, couching the instrument closer to his mouth and lowering his voice. He fished a pen from his breast pocket and said, "Can I have that again?"

"Mister Hare, that was no accident. My husband was a very careful man, in full possession of his faculties. But I believe he was also in possession of something else. Mister Hare. *Something*—some information perhaps."

She paused, adding, "I'm not hysterical, Mister Hare. But Peter often mentioned you. He read your articles in the paper, and, well—ah—I think we should talk."

"You've talked to the police?"

"Mister Hare, I've dealt with the police before," she said, "and this is not the sort of thing where they would be any help whatsoever. Believe me."

"Somehow," Chuck said, "I do. I *do* believe you."

Chuck recalled with a chill his own recent experience investigating the death of venerable Supervisor Francis McCarthy. In that case, obstruction was the keynote. Deduction was the last thing the police wanted.

"Where are you?" Chuck jotted down an address in the fog-swept Sunset district. He also took the phone number and told her, "I'll try to get there around noon."

Chuck turned to find Dirk and Alice attentively watching him. Alice spoke. "Something good?"

Chuck grinned at her. "Yes, she sounded all right, if you know what I mean?"

"Oh, I thought it was a story," Alice snapped.

Dirk glowered. "It was a story. You notice he didn't use the word 'sweetheart' once during the conversation."

"*Hey!*" said Chuck, ignoring the jibe. "Let's wander over to the Mayor's office and see what the stunning Marianne Connelly is wearing this day."

"Aah, yes," said Dirk "and the stunning Cecile Duncan and the stunning Betty Chung and the stunning Jack Estter and . . ."

Alice looked at Chuck as the trio clicked along the marble cor-

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ridor from the west side to the east side of City Hall. There the raven-haired widow Connelly presided as chief executive of San Francisco's billion-dollar municipal empire in the high-ceilinged, carpeted luxury taxpayers long ago had conceded to occupants of the Mayor's office.

"How are you and Cecile getting on?" Alice asked with twinkling curiosity.

Chuck played dumb. *"Me?"*

"You're not dating her?"

"Not so she'd notice," Chuck quipped. "Alice, you haven't paid attention. Cecile doesn't go much for the suave, but impoverished, middle-aged types with the little balding spot in the back of the head. And, frankly, some of us fun-loving, greedless, older types—well, we have other options."

"Yeah," said Dirk. "They drink a lot."

"You mean, Chuck, you still haven't *asked* her?" Alice was incredulous.

The trio, Hare in the lead, swept into Room 200, the big reception room, paused merely to tamp the floor button at the inside door and marched resolutely down the narrow corridor of interior offices, stopping in front of the windowless press office. Behind a huge desk, rimmed with stacks of newspapers, office memoranda, bound reports and telephone books stood slim, blonde Cecile Duncan, crisp in navy suit with white piping.

Cecile had the phone to her ear. "Yes, Derick. Yes, Derick. Look I've opened four o'clock for you. She'll be ready. But you know how she is. She has her own ideas on these things. Right?"

Cecile blushed and smiled and nodded.

"He's been doing some trivial series on senior citizens in the Tenderloin. Every two years some television reporter, still wearing his freshman beany, discovers the old folks in the Tenderloin," Alice said. "I suppose he wants Her Honor to prove up the series, to show how she's been kicked into action by Channel Seven?"

Cecile came around the desk and began to lead the triumverate toward Connelly's inner sanctum. She touched Hare's arm and asked, "How are you?"

"Well as can be expected," he said, giving her a grin.

Cecile rapped once on the sanctum door, then opened it a crack and stuck her head in. A moment later, she swung it open to admit the three reporters.

"Mornin' gang," chirped the Mayor, seated behind her ceremonial desk in a form-fitting turquoise pantsuit with both unslippered feet resting on the desk. She waved them toward the guest chairs which ringed the visitor's section.

"Over the cold, Alice? Good."

Dirk opened up. "For some reason, my publisher is ape over this dog law. My city editor wants

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a daily story on developments. The ordinance got out of Health Committee yesterday. Do you favor it?"

Mayor Connelly gave Dirk a restrained smile, then remarked, looking away, "if the Board finally approves it I shall not quarrel with its decision."

"You don't favor it?"

She looked at Wells. At length, she said, "That's Clyde Jergens' bill?"

Mention of Jergens, a mousey, nervous, conservative representative of the Richmond District, brought a chuckle from Hare. He snorted, "Captain fastidious."

Mayor Connelly regarded Chuck wryly. "Now, Chuck, Clyde Jergens is the *Bulletin*'s kind of people. He follows your paper's penny-pinching policies right down the line."

Chuck said, "Well, your honor, you did your share of jousting with the beetle-browed champion of Richmond in the past. I remember the fight over the Blackburn Building, for example."

"Yes," she leaned back in her chair, casting her blue-eyed gaze at the far ceiling. "He fought that to a standstill for weeks. For a time I thought he would kill it. But, you know," she swung forward, dropping her feet from the desk and seemed about to tell Chuck a surprising thing.

"Supervisor Jergens is chairman of Finance Committee and I am trying to cooperate with the Board. I don't intend to pick any fights over something like this."

Chuck, too, remembered the long, tedious debates on whether to close the alley and to allow additional building height. He also recalled that, in the end, Jergens voted for it.

Chuck got to his feet. "Anything on your mind?"

The Mayor shook her beautiful head and stood up, smiling and giving full effect to the form-fitting outfit. She said "Thanks for coming."

Chuck's phone was ringing as he reached the press room and he dashed for it. Joe Cannzoni, the city's new Public Works director, was on the line. Chuck had met Cannzoni. But the relationship was still young.

"Mister Hare? Jim Cannzoni here. I, uh, I hate to bother you, but I had a call from a Mrs. Dobler. She said she had talked with you?"

"Yes, Joe?"

"Well, Mister Hare, Missus Dobler is making allegations and I hope—that is, I trust—you are not going to put anything in the paper before we've had a chance to check it out. And I hope you will give me a chance to answer any questions?"

Chuck bristled. "Joe, news is my business. You can be sure, when I need your comment, I'll ask for it." He paused. "What

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allegations did she make?"

"That's just it," Cannzoni rushed on. "She claims her husband was—aah—was killed. But she doesn't have any reason or —what's the word I'm looking for?—evidence. That's it, evidence. What can I say? Police say it's an accident. I feel for her, but—"

Chuck interrupted "What was his job? What was he supposed to be inspecting?"

"Plumbing. He was a plumber. I'm just afraid unwarranted publicity could expose the city to a damage suit or needless embarrassment. You know."

"I know," chuck said flatly. "If I need you, I'll call."

II

CHUCK HARE DROVE as he had once played football, on the premise that the best defense was a lively offense. Thus, the much-bruised old VW bug he piloted could be observed shooting yellow lights and hopping lanes to avoid slower vehicles like something desperately in search of a bathroom.

The VW careened off Noriega and into Thirty-first Avenue at 12:12 p.m. and stopped like a pair of Adidas in front of the Dobler row house 50 seconds later.

The house was white. The weather was grey. And the widow Dobler, revealed in the subdued light within the richly appointed dwelling, was alabaster, draped in a fine assortment of shimmering blacks, from her raven tresses, which hung nearly to her buttocks, to the lace bodice and satin dressing gown which failed with refreshing frequency to hide dancer's legs and black strap pumps.

"Charles?" she asked, smiling.

"Call me Chuck."

She walked him into the living room, gestured toward the snow-white divan, slipped into a black, leather armchair nearby and crossed her legs.

Dobler, as Chuck recalled, was closer to 60 than 50, and Julia Dobler, a candidate for coolest widow of the week, appeared closer to 35 than 40. She wore stylish, outsized spectacles on the bridge of a thin, yet longish nose, and no makeup. Her wide, thin mouth seemed to struggle for repose against an overbite that lent a girlish caste to her face.

"Drink?" she asked after a moment of mutual appraisal.

"Coffee, if it's handy," Chuck said. He watched her like a jungle animal as she glided out of the room, then returned to bow before him and place the cup and saucer at hand.

At length, she said, "Do I seem rational to you, Mister Hare?"

"Oh, better than that—better than that," Chuck said. "And it's Chuck, remember?"

"Better than rational?" she smiled.

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Chuck laughed. "You'll have to bear with me, Mrs. Dobler." He shook his head and looked away for a moment, as if to reduce the voltage.

"You *are* a bit sensational, even for a middle-aged urban cynic. Give me a moment to regain my equilibrium. I'm afraid if you asked me to jump of the Golden Gate Bridge right now, I'd just go out and do it."

She laughed and tugged her gown so that it covered her knees. She said "Chuck, I believe you have a way with women."

He shook his head again. "Just the opposite."

He lit a cigaret and took a couple of swallows of coffee, then leaned back and said, "Why did you call Cannzoni?"

Julia Dobler said "Because he was Peter's boss, the head of the department. I wanted to find out about the insurance."

Chuck said, "But the city has no insurance on its employees?"

She said, "So they told me. I couldn't *believe* it! I guess I gave Cannzoni a little piece of my mind. I was upset. I suppose I shouldn't have said anything about my suspicions. But I didn't want him to get off that easy, you know."

"Well," Chuck said, after another swig of coffee, "why don't you tell me?"

"Peter has been awfully good to me." She gestured to indicate the home and its expensive furnishings. "Six years ago I was working in Vegas. I had nothing" —she swung her leg—"except what the gods provided. Then I met Peter, a bright, fun-loving, yet gentle man and—well, we agreed to make something permanent out of our friendship."

She paused and removed her glasses and sighed, avoiding Chuck's gaze. Then, she continued. "It's been very good. Not exciting. But very comfortable, very warming."

She paused again, then brought her large hazel eyes level with Chuck's gaze. "I want justice for this man. He deserves justice."

"Of course," Chuck replied.

"I need a drink," she said, suddenly getting to her feet and spinning off into the interior. She returned carrying a highball.

"I guess I'm beginning to feel it," she said. "The loss."

"Let's talk about the Blackburn project," Chuck said.

"Well, Peter was asssigned the project about two months ago. He was sort of excited about it for a time. It's the biggest building he's ever worked on and he was rubbing elbows with big time contractors and politicians. It was exciting, up until a couple of weeks ago."

"What happened then?"

"I don't know what happened, but one night he came home and he was quiet, somber, morose,

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you know? Suddenly, he didn't want to talk about it any more. He seemed worried, even irritable. I tried to quiz him, and three days ago we had a real fight about it, about his moping around. I was only trying to help," she added plaintively.

"Of course," Chuck agreed.

"Well, he said something during that row that told me that what was wrong was a matter of conscience. Can you understand that? He said something about 'dirty situation' and 'sweetheart deal'."

"No names? No indication whether it involved city officials?" Chuck rubbed his chin. "That's not much to go on, my dear. How about documents? Notes? Reports? Have you any of his work records?"

She stood up with a toss of her head which brought the sheath of jet black across her shoulders so that it cascaded bewitchingly down her bosom.

"I thought of that," she said. From the mantel above the small tiled fireplace, she took a large envelope, which she handed Chuck. She explained, "I couldn't find his job book. It's yellow, canvas-covered, and he was probably carrying it. The Coroner has those things, anything he was carrying. But I did search his bureau here, and our car."

Chuck Hare emptied the contents onto the coffee table. There were a few business cards, some with numbers jotted on the backside. There were a few brief letters to Dobler and some pink copies of his correspondence to others. Once was a letter from Empire Development, inviting Dobler to a Fisherman's Wharf luncheon to observe the halfway mark in Blackburn's construction.

Most correspondence, however, was between Dobler and his superior, J.F. Berg, assistant superintendant of Building Inspection. Chuck made some notes. The name Empire rang a faint bell in his mind, but mostly the names were unfamiliar and the correspondence unexciting.

"Keep this," Chuck said, at length, handing back the envelope and getting to his feet. She stood, also, gently running fingers through her hair and gazing coolly at him.

"I don't know what to say," Chuck said. "You have a feeling about this which I can respect. But without evidence, without a lead to his concern, I don't know what I can do."

He met her silent gaze for a long moment, then Chuck stepped toward her and took her hand. He said, "Tell you what I *will* do, if it will help? I'll throw myself off the Golden Gate Bridge?"

At that she smiled and gave his hand a squeeze, then pulled free and began leading him toward the door. She said "I know it's all very vague. Maybe, if you talked to others? If you could see his job book?"

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She opened the front door, then turned and grasped Chuck's hands and said, "Will you call me?"

III

"ONE OF MY best men. But I don't understand what he was doin' up there," Joe Berg lamented.

Chuck sat up. "You mean Dobler had no reason to be above the nineteenth floor?"

"Listen," Berg said, "those plumbers got a good union. They don't go in until the sides are enclosed and the temporary flooring is installed.

Chuck bent over Berg's desk "Let me see that list of contractors again."

"Sure." Berg slid the paper across the desk. "You know my policy. Open book."

"I don't see Empire Development on here?"

"They don't build—they own," Berg said. "The general is Hamilton Construction. But, really, the only contractor Dobler would deal with is the plumber, Mono Pipe. You might talk to Mono's superintendent, an old timer, Jack Olson."

"Joe, I appreciate it. And if anything occurs to you, if anything turns up in Dobler's stuff, please call me."

Chuck trotted back to City Hall, pausing in the basement lunch room to bolt a packaged sandwich and a cup of coffee. Finance Committee was already under way and the press room was empty when he got upstairs.

Chuck had calls to make and he didn't want an audience. He gave the *Bulletin* library a half a dozen names to check out. He reached the *Bulletin*'s veteran police reporter, Mel Cleaver, at the Hall of Justice and asked for a copy of the police report of Dobler's death.

"Can do," Cleaver said. "But you know who does the real job on these things? State Industrial Accident Division."

Cleaver gave Chuck a name. Then Chuck called Mullins, manager of the employees' pension system.

"Don't you guys do anything for widows of accident victims?" Chuck began.

"For Christ's sake, Hare! Of course we do. Immediately we give 'em a death benefit check. You know, for funeral costs. Then, depending on the guy's status, either they start drawing the pension he would have had, or they get a lump sum payment of his accumulated contributions. Let me check this one out. I'll talk to the lady this afternoon."

Chuck was about to dial Julia Dobler when the *Bulletin* phone rang. The gravel voice of City Editor Fred Winston spilled onto his bright, new enthusiasm.

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"Chuck, my boy, you're doing it again."

"What?"

"Chuck, I just had a call from our esteemed leader, the publisher and my boss, Benjamin Campbell."

"*What?*"

"My reaction, exactly, Mister Campbell wants to know why you are investigating the Blackburn Building development? Now, Chuck, it's not ours to reason why. It is ours to answer Mister Campbell's questions. In order to do that, of course, we—and I speak for everyone on the city desk—we must be informed."

"Okay, okay, Fred," Chuck broke in, "spare me the sarcasm. I get it. You want to know what I'm doing—right?"

"If I'm to continue sending those paychecks out there, yes, I want to know what you're doing. Now, *What the hell are you doing?*"

Chuck quickly explained about the widow Dobler's suspicions. He said, "Look, I took my own lunch time to explore it. It's probably nothing, but I want to check out a couple of things, if only to pacify a loyal *Bulletin* reader and a human being in anguish. If I find a story, Fred, you'll be the first to hear about it. But you know what bothers me, now? What adds to the uneasy feeling about this?"

"What?" Winston snapped.

"Your call—Campbell's interest. Fred, Who is so damned worried about this that my tentative little scratching around could reach the publisher?"

"Oh, Charles," Winston moaned. "You're doin' it to me again. You're shaking something and pretty soon I'll be buried in apples. Now keep me posted."

Winston hung up and Chuck fell back in his swivel chair and began to whistle softly. He ran a hand through his thinning hair and surveyed the Nancy Howry Thompson mural on the far wall gazing wistfully at the ever-blue sky through the mural's ever-open bay window. Then the phone rang.

"Honeypie, you are drivin' me crazy, I'm in love but I'm lazy and will I see you tonight?" came the musical question from Joanne Clayton, the dark-haired city planner in Hare's life.

Chuck laughed. "Your place or mine?"

"Any place is fine."

"How about the Bank Exchange, for openers? Maybe five-thirty?" he said.

"*Great!*"

From the thirty-fifth floor penthouse suite of the Continental Building Ralph McNear, who built a cow-county quarry into a financial empire, could observe most of the budding Blackburn Building project, latest jewel of his Empire Development Company. Through a small, yet powerful telescope mounted in his office, the diminu-

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tive, 56-year-old patron of arts, politicians and all manner of secret delights followed construction progress as steel jackstraws took shape four blocks distant.

Construction of the Blackburn held many satisfactions for McNear, least of which was the fact that it would bestow luster on the maternal side of his family, which had borne the proud name in comparative poverty heretofore.

What really delighted him was the financial compactness of the enterprise. As the stuff of empire, it served McNear beautifully. While his development company borrowed the money and took the title, McNear's thriving sand-and-gravel company sold the ingredients of concrete to McNear's East Bay cement and precast concrete firm, which, in turn, fabricated the $20 million worth of building walls. The insurance business he shared with Governor Alessandro Molinari collected the liability premiums on all contractors.

McNear tied in additional political allies by letting the electrical equipment contract to the firm of Supervisor Andros Stasikas and the plumbing fixtures to a Los Angeles firm which, in return for the $5-million contract, had agreed to a 5-percent agent's fee for Supervisor Clyde Jergens, once a troublesome critic of the venture.

But on this particular overcast November Wednesday, there was a smudge on McNear's rose-tinted glasses. He massaged them with a linen handkerchief as he talked into the speaker phone.

"I want that woman out of here, understand? Go there. Make the best deal you can. But let's go to one hundred thousand, if she'll sign the release of liability and take a trip. Is that clear?"

McNear pushed the button ending the conversation with the manager of his insurance firm and punched in the operator.

"Get me Supervisor Jergens, please. Try City Hall."

McNear swung back in his leather-padded chair and turned to glimpse the fascinating eastern panorama view of the bay, today a placid state, dotted by only a tanker and a ferryboat. If only Marianne were approachable. McNear sighed.

Since McCarthy and the extremely delicate situation surrounding the old boy's death, McNear had remained at cordial, arms-length from the new Mayor. He sensed something there, something very strong, very formidable. With so much at stake right now, the Blackburn and this billion-dollar sewer improvement program, about to get into construction, McNear didn't want to rock the boat.

The phone light flashed. "Mister McNear, we get no answer at Supervisor Jergen's home or office and the City Hall reports

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he called in sick and cancelled appointments the rest of the week."

"Thank you," McNear said, clearing the line, then slamming the desk with the palm of his hand. "Fool! Fool!"

THE *BULLETIN* LIBRARY offered Chuck Hare little, except to joggle his recollection that Empire Development was a McNear enterprise. This fattened Chuck's suspicions. He knew McNear was capable of anything but Chuck couldn't visualize him doing in Dobler, nor conceive a reason why he should. McNear was out of public life, thanks to earlier Charles A. Hare bylines.

"Hullo?" the gruff male voice surprised Chuck.

"Missus Dobler?"

"She ain't here."

"This is Chuck Hare, of the *Bulletin,* I think she'll . . . "

"She ain't here, I said," the man said and hung up.

Chuck sat a moment, confronting the buzzing telephone, then slammed it onto its rocker nest and exclaimed aloud "Well, I'll *be!*"

Dirk Wells hove into the press room as Chuck spun out of the *Bulletin* cubicle, cursing.

"My sentiments, exactly," Dirk said. "They oughta bottle Finance Committee meetings as a sleeping potion. Jesus, how boring!" He threw his notebook on his desk and stamped into the center of the room.

"Where've you been, hotshot?"

"Spinning my wheels," Chuck bellowed, disgustedly.

"Be grateful you weren't listening to the delegates from San Francisco's Sixth and Eighth Districts interrogate the director of the West Side Mental Health Station." Harum threw up his hands. "Honestly, it's a game to see who can be the stupidest. No wonder upright, intelligent citizens are seldom seen in City Hall."

Chuck stood, nursing a cup with the last dregs of morning coffee and the worst frustration since Marianne Connelly became Mayor. Then, his phone rang. Truculently he marched to the phone and jerked off the hook. "Hello!"

"Chuck? Chuck Hare?" The soothing, liquid tones of Julia Dobler slipped into his ear and bathed his ruptured psyche like some remarkable linament. "Chuck, I'm so sorry. He didn't know."

"He who?" Chuck asked, his vocal chords adrift somewhere between anger and compassion. He repeated "*Who?*"

She said, "That's Harold. He's an old friend from Vegas. I called him yesterday, you know, after I got the news. He's going to—ah—hold my hand for a while. You know?"

Chuck said, "Sure, sure. The

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reason I called was to see if Mullins reached you and—well—to let you know I'm still looking into things."

She said, "Oh, yes, Mister Mullins was here. He gave me a check for $2,500. He gave me the forms for filling an industrial accident claim. He said I'll get a check for Peter's pension contributions next week. Listen, I want to thank you for getting me such quick service. I don't know what I would have done."

"That's fine," Chuck said, "but it occurs to me, as I got into this investigation, I may need you. You won't get lost on me? At least for the next day or two?"

Softly, Julia answered "Chuck, I'm not the kind who gets lost—or mislaid—easily."

IV

CHUCK, IN PENNEY loafers, trenchcoat and unmatched trousers and jacket, suffered momentary self-consciousness among the high-styled throng of young men and women he encountered at the Bank Exchange. Then he spotted Joanne waving from a booth. She stood to hug him and Chuck smiled at the fashionable vision of Freye boots, knickers, wet-pink blouse and high-collared camel's hair three-quarter coat. He hugged her hard.

He remembered a snatch from an old Fats Waller number—"Where've I been hiding all your life?"

"Why ain't you my husband"—she picked it up at once—"and I your wife?"

He clasped her hands before him on the table and said, "It's been a long two or three days. I'm so glad every time I see you."

Her dark, intelligent eyes held his as she smiled.

"Gimlets. A pair," he told the waitress without shifting his gaze from Joanne, who said, "You didn't even look at her legs. Are you ill?"

"I'm into cheeks and chins and lips this evening," he said, eyes still fixed on one of his favorite faces. He let go of her hands and sat back. "Anyway, I had legs for lunch."

"What?"

Chuck proceeded to give Joanne Clayton a rundown of the Dobler case, including a description of Julia Dobler, tempered slightly.

"What's her friend Harold like?" Joanne inquired.

Chuck laughed. "Haven't seen him. But he sounds like a Mack truck in a pinstriped suit. I'm not sure I *want* to see him, though it might be worth the risk for another glimpse of the widow."

Joanne pursed her lips and shook her head. "Jeez, Chuck! Do you ever hear me talk that way about a man?"

Chuck looked down. "Maybe

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you're right. But, damn it, Joanne, you can't squelch the macho traits of the ages in a single, if enlightened, decade."

She ignored him. "I remember the Blackburn project. Molinari, when he was mayor, put a lot of heat on the department to get the plans approved. And the street closing. That's one of McNear's babies?"

"You got it."

"I guess," she mused, favoring Chuck with a smile, "some forces in town are simply irresistable."

"Like McNear?"

"And some others I know," she said, patting his hand. "But what could be the motive for murdering a city inspector on that project? What would he know that would be worth killing?"

Chuck said, "I've been puzzling the same question. Let's kick it around. To begin, he visits the construction site a lot. He sees the caliber of the work. What else?"

Joanne said, "He would see other visitors. Give me your napkin. Let's make a list—what the inspector sees. Okay? Okay. He sees people. He sees materials. He sees the materials being put in place."

Chuck said, "Yeah, but if he sees anything wrong with the way the material is being used, it's his job to report it. That's the one thing he's paid to do. Right? Bear in mind, we're talking about a plumbing inspector. Is there anything hazardous about faulty plumbing? Any reason he wouldn't report faulty plumbing?"

Joanne said, "I can't imagine it, unless he was bribed."

"If some one could bribe him, they wouldn't have to kill him," Chuck said.

"Moving right along now, folks," Joanne said, "how about supplies. Who supplies the plumbing?"

Chuck sat up. "*Ding, dong!* You just said something."

"I did, I *did?*"

"You said *'supplies.'* That's different from construction, right? I mean, that's a separate area of financial interest—supplies. Looking for the conflict, the corruption, I've been looking at contractors. But the people who supply the contractors—that's a whole new field of exploration. First thing tomorrow."

Joanne said, "We haven't finished the list. What about people the inspector sees?"

Chuck said, "Well, he would have to see his killer, right? Or would he? But anyone find out who he sees? Who he sees that disturbs him?"

Joanne said, "What if he saw Mrs. Dobler?"

Chuck guffawed. "If she appeared on the site, *fifty* guys would fall out of the building. I can picture it."

Joanne smiled patiently. "You

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buy her story entirely?"

Chuck looked at her. "Why shouldn't I? It makes sense that a building inspector might find out something incriminating, something involving a public official, for example. Something he knows is wrong."

"Of course, that makes sense," Joanne agreed. "But does it make sense that he wouldn't even tell his wife?"

"Well," Chuck demurred, "perhaps he didn't want to worry her. Didn't want to put her in danger."

Joanne leaned toward him, the pink blouse straining against her small bosom. "If he was a fan of yours and he was so honest and he found something fishy, why didn't he call you?"

"Or, why didn't he just tell 'Open Book' Berg?" Chuck said, mulling over Joanne's question. He polished off the gimlet and motioned to the waitress, whose flared cocktail dress didn't quite contain her derriere. He held up his glass. "More, more."

He returned his gaze to Joanne. "No one calls a newspaper unless they want the facts disclosed."

"I guess it's one of the things I like about you," Joanne said, smiling and reaching for his hand. "You're so naive at times."

"Well?" he said.

"You assume anyone who calls you must be on the up and up." Joanne got to her feet. "Come on. Let's get in that empty can of cat food you call an automobile."

"What about the drinks?"

"Gimlets can wait, this is paradox."

V

"FIRST, JUST for the hellavit," Chuck said, "let's tool by the Blackburn Building."

The VW whizzed through the deserted canyons of the financial district. Joanne bunched, hugging her Freyes and swaying with every turn until Chuck skidded to a stop. Both got out across the street from the board fence which surrounded the site and stood there a moment, staring up into the black chilly night.

Dimly, they could make out a light at the top of the construction elevator and a couple of blinker lights along the topmost girders, leaving an ominous, dark gap between the top and the nineteenth floor, where the yellow, concrete facia plating began its monotonous blanket to the ground.

"Just wanted the feel of it," Chuck remarked as they climbed back into the VW, executed a U-turn and sped south.

Next stop was the *Bulletin* office, south of Market.

Chuck had to do some fast talking to persuade the balding young night city editor. But Annie Logan, the *Bulletin's* impetuous photo-

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grapher, bought the plan immediately.

"Come on, Bill," Annie pleaded with the young editor. "No reason for me to sit around here all night, waiting for a two-alarm fire. You can always raise me on the car radio. Come *on!*"

"Bill," Chuck explained, "this probably won't take more than an hour, out and back time. It's sort of an experiment. You know, sometimes experiments pay dividends. Remembr penicillin? It may be nothing. But pamper me. Pretend this is a big time operation and I'm a star reporter. Didn't you ever see any Clark Gable movies?"

"Okay, *okay,*" Bill Oakes conceded. "But I'm going to call Winston and tell him what you're doing to me. I gotta tell Winston."

"Sure, kid," Chuck said, turning to Annie Logan. He jotted the address on a piece of scratch paper. "Let me go in first. Give me two minutes. Then you come to the door. Otherwise, play it by ear."

Joanne, standing by, observed all this with a smile.

"CLYDE, CLYDE, Clyde," McNear cajoled. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Ralph?" Clyde Jergens screeched over the phone. He was in his underwear, perched on the edge of a bed in a San Diego motel room. Through Governor Molinari and a little quiet checking by the California Highway Patrol, McNear had located the errant San Francisco legislator.

"Clyde, what are you doing in San Diego?" McNear's tone turned demanding. "You left us with a problem, Clyde. A very expensive problem. That's not very considerate."

"Ralph, what am I going to do? I thought getting away, avoiding any questions, was best. But what am I going to *do?*"

"Now, Clyde," the older man chided, "I think you had better come home and start acting natural. No need to panic. No need at all. We've"—McNear paused—"reached the widow Dobler, Clyde. She'll be no further problem."

Clyde Jergens fished a cigaret from an open pack on the side table, managing to upset the package on the floor, and nervously tried to strike a match with the phone in his hand.

"Clyde?" McNear said.

"I'm here. Just a minute. Just a . . ."

"One thing, Clyde," McNear resumed, "Missus Dobler did talk to Chuck Hare."

"What! Oh, *my God!*"

"Now, Clyde, take it easy. She didn't tell him anything. But you know that guy. He's—well—he's potentially dangerous. You must be prepared to deal with

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him if it comes to that. I don't think it will. I took some steps today I believe will quash Mister Hare's interest. But you got us into this, Clyde, and if worst comes to worst, you're going to have to take the fall. Do you understand?"

"Now, wait a minute Ralph McNear. *Just you wait a minute.*" Jergens jounced up and down on the motel bed in anxiety. "What do you mean, I take the fall? You wouldn't send me to prison? My God!" Jergens cried hysterically.

"You do that, Ralph, and I'll blow the whistle on the whole sheebang. Ya hear? The whole *sheebang*. I do that, Ralph, and they'll stop you. The city will stop you, right there at the twenty-fifth floor."

"Clyde, get ahold of yourself."

"I tell 'em I was fixed before the vote on the alley bill, Ralph, and that does it. That invalidates the ordinance. That eliminates three hundred thousand square feet of additional building space. That's more than one million dollars a year you won't get from now to eternity, Ralph. No sir, I'm not taking no fall. Not me," Jergens screamed into the phone.

McNear's tone was even, quiet, resolute. "Listen to me, Clyde Jergens, and listen well. Get your head together. Get back to San Francisco. Don't open your mouth until I tell you. And get *this* through your skull. If you go to prison, Ralph McNear is the only one who can ever get you out again. Is that clear?"

VI

CHUCK SPOTTED the souped-up, gold, '68 Mustang with the Nevada plates parked in front of the white-faced bungalow on 31st Avenue as he eased the old VW cautiously into a curb space two doors down.

"That must be Harold," Chuck said, nodding toward the Mustang as he joined Joanne on the sidewalk.

She said, "You sure you want me along?"

He took her arm. "I need you for ballast, baby."

Just as they started toward the house, the entrance light went on and the front door swung open and a burly man in a knit suit and flowered sports shirt barreled out to the car, juggling three large suitcases as though they were balloons. As Chuck and Joanne watched, motionless, the man popped the cases into the trunk, then trotted back into the house.

"What the . . . " Chuck ran toward the Dobler house, leaped the front stairs and hit the doorbell just as the door swung open again, revealing Julia Dobler, resplendant in gold lame trousers and knee-length fox jacket.

Behind her, toting two hatboxes

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and another huge suitcase, stood the man, a hard looking character in his forties, somewhat shorter than Hare's 5'10" but twice as wide and twice as thick.

"What's up?" Chuck said grimly, watching the expression of surprise struggle through the seconds to achieve a plaintive smile on her face.

"*Chuck!* What are you—"

"*Outta da way, Buster!*" the man behind her thundered.

Julia Dobler raised a hand to him. "No, Harold. Uh,—Chuck, what are you doing? Uh—as you see, we're just leaving. I decided after all, a change would do me good. You understand."

"*No!* I don't understand a damn thing," Chuck said angrily, as Joanne arrived on the scene behind him. Chuck stepped inside the house. "You're not going anywhere until I get a few answers."

At that, Harold tossed aside the baggage, with one arm pushed aside Julia Dobler and with the other drew from his jacket a menacing revolver.

"*Inside* Buster. You, too, girlie," he said, gesturing with the gun.

But Chuck, still in the doorway, stood his ground and thrust a hand back to halt Joanne. "What's the big idea?" Chuck demanded.

The husky man stepped closer and jabbed the revolver into Hare's stomach. The man said, "*Move* it," through clinched teeth.

"Talk about your George Raft movies," Joanne whispered nervously. But Chuck stood his ground. The tableau in the lighted doorway, to a casual observer, might have been three people saying goodnight after a card game.

"Harold! For God's *sake!*" Julia Dobler grabbed the big man's shoulders. "Let them go and let's get out of here."

"Dis guy with Jergens?"

"No. No. *No!* For God's sake!" Julia Dobler pleaded to pull the big man away. "He's just a sap from the newspaper. I used him to frighten Jergens. For God's sake, don't kill 'em. He knows nothing. *Nothing!* Leave them alone and let's get out of here."

"*Use* me!" Chuck erupted.

"Yes, Mister Hare, I used you. I knew if you started asking questions at City Hall, *I'd* get action, even if *you* didn't get answers. Don't tell me it's the first time a woman has 'used' you, Mister Hare." Julia Dobler spoke with machine-gun matter-of-factness, retaining her grasp on Harold's shoulders. "Now, shut up. I'm trying to save your life."

She ran a hand across the big man's cheek. "Harold, precious. *Please,* listen to me. Honey, these people are nothing. They know nothing. Let them go.

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We can drive right out of here, free and clear, with $120,000 and more to come."

Joanne pressed close behind Chuck and spoke up, "I don't think it's fair to use Chuck and not even give him the story."

Chuck, dimly aware of a passing vehicle in the street behind him, picked up the idea. "Yeah. She's right. Jergens—is that Clyde Jergens? Supervisor Clyde Jergens?"

The big man had begun to yield to Julia Dobler's pressure. The gaudy pair inched back into the hallway and he slipped the revolver beneath his jacket.

"Get the bags, Harold," she said, continuing to confront Chuck and Joanne. A thin smile appeared. "Of *course,* Supervisor Jergens. There was one item I didn't show you, Chuck—an invoice."

She reached into her purse, dug a moment, then brought out a Xerox sheet and handed it to him. "Why don't you keep this as sort of a souvenir."

Chuck glanced at the paper, a copy of a receipt from Flush King Plumbing Fixtures, Los Angeles, with *C. Jergens* written in the box marked *agent.*

"I won't need it anymore," Julia Dobler remarked, taking Harold's free arm as the couple stepped past Chuck and Joanne and started down the path to the Mustang. She called back, "Switch off the lights and close the door, will you please? There's a nice boy."

Just as the pair reached the curb, a brown sedan lurched from a nearby curb space and squealed to halt across the Mustang's bow, doors flying open and burly plainclothesmen leaping out with drawn guns.

Joanne collapsed on Chuck's arm and Annie Logan suddenly appeared from the shrubbery next door and began hopping around the excited knot of people at the curb. *Flash—flash—flash.*

CHUCK, JOANNE and Annie Logan stood on the chilly curb, watching the police car disappear toward the Hall of Justice. He turned to Annie.

She grinned and ran her fingers back through her short-cropped hair. "You said to play it by ear, so when I first drove past and saw that palooka with the gun, well, I got on the horn and called for reinforcements. While I was waiting, though, I took some long-lens stuff from across the street. The light wasn't the best, but I wanta get back to the lab and see. Bye—bye." She scooted off to her office Nova.

Joanne hugged Chuck's arm and they moseyed toward the old VW bug. She said, "Let's find another gimlet and then, I think, there was an implied supper

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in our arrangement for this evening." She smiled at him and touched her head against his shoulder.

"Sorry," Chuck said, holding the door as Joanne crawled into the VW. "Gimlets will have to wait. This is *news*."

He climbed in beside her and turned the ignition key. He whooped as they careened into Noriega and sped east. "Thank God I won't have Clyde Jergens to listen to any more."

Joanne inquired "I still don't understand? Did Jergens kill Peter Dobler?"

"Captain Fastidious? Careful Clyde? I doubt it. With that illicit contract for the plumbing fixtures, he wouldn't be caught within a mile of the building. But we just saw a man to whom killing is nothing—Harold. He's tough enough to have taken Peter Dobler up in the construction elevator and thrown him off the twenty-fifth floor."

"I think he and the practical Julia Dobler executed the shakedown of Jergens after Peter discovered the incriminating invoice, then dumped Peter when he got conscience-stricken. How you prove it, beats me. But Jergens—*aah*. Jergens we will prove."

Chuck drove a while in silence. At length, he said, "If there were any justice they'd have sent Jergens over years ago for first degree tedium."

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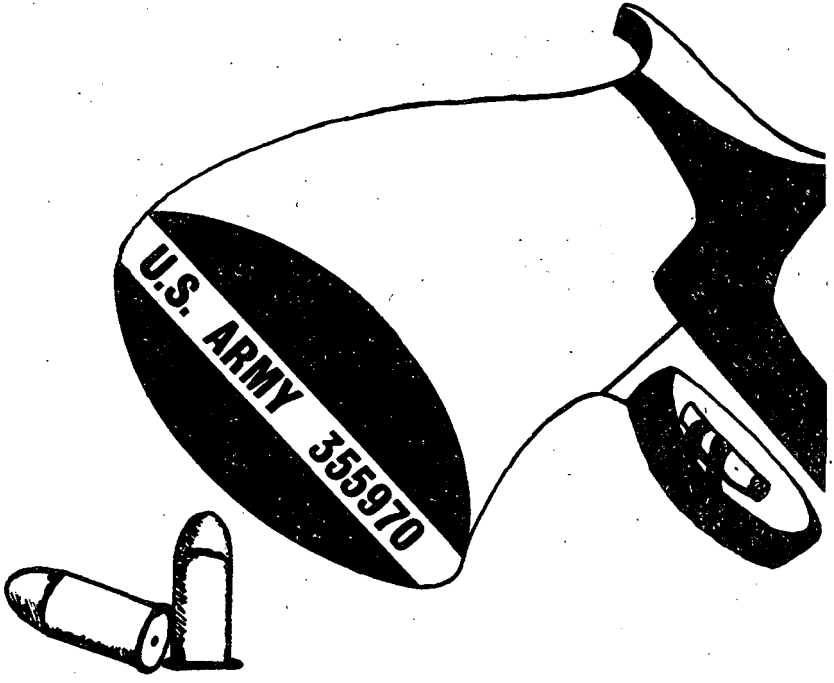
THE SPY CAME D.O.A.



by W.L. FIELDHOUSE

The Big Problem for Lansing in Running Down Major Hansen's Murderer Lay in the Fact that Everybody Wanted in on the Action.

CLIFFORD LANSING removed his O.D. green baseball cap with two black captain's bars tacked above the bill and walked to the shrouded form on the concrete slab. As he raised the sheet, a naked over-

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head bulb cast harsh light upon the shattered face of the dead man. Two bullets had destroyed the corpse's features. Little remained of the face except tightly clenched teeth visible amongst a neatly trimmed brown beard, streaked with gray and speckled with blood.

"I don't believe you knew Major Hansen," said the stout white-haired man with a single silver star on each epaulet of his tunic.

"I met him once," Lansing replied as he lowered the shroud. "Narcotics investigation, as I recall."

General Clayton nodded. "He was an undercover agent in the Nuremberg area. Hansen traveled all over Bavaria disguised as an insurance salesman with an American firm that has a European branch."

The captain turned to the blue eyed German clad in a *Nurnberg Polizei* uniform who stood silently by the general. "Where was he found, *Herr Leutnant?*" Lansing inquired.

"By an alley on *Schutze Strabe.*" the German answered. He spoke English slowly, pronouncing each word as if reciting a telegram. "Nobody saw the shooting. It was very late, people were sleeping. Those who look out saw nothing. The street was cloudy..." The policeman grimaced as he realized he had used the wrong term.

"We know about the fog, *der Nebel,*" *Lansing said.* "You're doing fine. Please continue."

"Many heard the shot. They compare it to a cannon." The German cop seemed embarrassed by his countrymens' lack of originality.

"People always do." Lansing grinned, informing the *Polizist* that non-inventive similes are equally common to other nationalities.

"We found this," the cop announced as he moved to a small metal desk. Lying on an ink blotter was a blue-black revolver.

Lansing carefully picked up the gun by its handle, knowing the checkered-walnut grips wouldn't retain fingerprints, so he needn't worry about destroying evidence. "Smith and Wesson, Model Ten, thirty-eight caliber," he declared.

"Our flight personnel still use thirty-eights," General Clayton stated grimly. "The nearest U.S. Army base, Munson Barracks, has an airfield."

Lansing placed the revolver on the table and copied its serial number on a small note pad. He noticed a trio of .38 Special cartridges and an equal number of empty shell casings on the blotter. The captain didn't touch them as the shells, unlike the grips, might offer some prints.

"The Nuremberg Police have agreed to co-operate with the Criminal Investigation Depart-

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ment," Clayton began. "I want the bastard who murdered Major Hansen, Cliff. I want the best Homicide investigator in USAEUR on this case."

"I'm flattered, sir," Lansing commented as he slipped the note pad into a pocket of his field jacket. "I see why you got me out of bed at five in the morning on a Saturday. This is pretty important."

"One of our own has been killed, Captain," the general declared sternly, "That's pretty important, indeed."

U.S. military installations in Europe are much smaller then the massive stateside training bases such as Fort Ord, Fort Dix or Fort Jackson. The airfield at Munson Barracks wasn't large enough to accommodate big fighter planes. Most of its aircraft were realitively small helicopters.

Lansing didn't like choppers. They reminded him of enormous mechanical mosquitoes—creatures from the world of science fiction and nightmares. A former Airborne Ranger, Lansing knew his attitude was foolish, yet he couldn't repress a shudder as he drove by the airfield.

He had seen helicopters shot down in Vietnam. One had little chance to bail out. When an 'egg-beater' crashed it was like an oversized fishbowl with a gas tank and a couple of pounds of T.N.T. erupting together.

Noticing two MP jeeps parked in front of Alpha Battery, Lansing pulled his Volkswagon up behind them. Leaving the car, he entered the barracks, strolled by an empty CQ desk and to the orderly room. It wasn't difficult to find. He merely followed the sound of angry screaming.

"How the hell could it just be 'missing', Burns?" The shouter was a red-faced man, dressed in fatigues with first sergeant's insignia pinned to his collar. His flabby belly wiggled as he nervously paced the office.

Two military policemen stood by, obviously uncomfortable around the ranting first sergeant, who snarled at a short wiry buck sergeant. One MP pretended to examine the papers on his clipboard. The other looked at the clipboard with envy. Lansing rapped his knuckles against the door frame.

"Lansing, C.I.D," he announced.

"Nobody called your department!" the first sergeant exclaimed. He swallowed as if his own words had startled him. "I didn't mean any offense by that, sir. It's just . . ."

"I understand, Top," Lansing assured him, using the standard nick-name for first sergeants everywhere. "I was just assigned to a case and I have a hunch that what's happened here concerns it."

"What's happened here, sir," the First Sergeant (his name tag

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read *Whitfield)* explained, "is a problem in the arms room. Sergeant Burns, here was the Charge of Quarters NCO last night. Sergeant Johnson arrived to relieve Burns of duty at zero seven hundred. As you know, the CQ isn't just the acting head of the barracks while the Battery Commander and I aren't here. He also retains the keys to the arms room in case an emergency arises."

"And, following standard operational procedures," Lansing supplied, "the new CQ conducted an inventory of the arms room and discovered it was one gun short. Right?"

Whitfield nodded woodenly.

"Would it happen to be a thirty-eight-caliber revolver; Serial Number, D227170?"

"Yes, sir," the MP with the clipboard confirmed.

"Six rounds of ammunition were missing, too," Whitfield added.

"Now," Lansing said dryly, "there are only three."

Descending a flight of stairs to the basement, Lansing discovered several doors. Signs clearly labeled each room—the unit supply office, TA50 (field gear) and the arms room. The latter was more obvious, as its thick metal door was open and an MP guarded the threshold.

Inside, another military cop and a distraught captain struggled with a large crate of 5.56-millimeter ammunition. A dark-haired young man with a neatly trimmed moustach, dressed in civilian attire, counted the two hundred and fifty M16 assult rifles in the racks lining the dense concrete walls. A large ring of keys jingled in his fist. Lansing introduced himself and stepped past the sentry.

"I'm the Battery Commander," the other captain *(Mulligan* was written on his name tag) explained. He offered a hand and Lansing shook it.

"Anything else missing besides the thirty-eight and six rounds?" the CID investigator inquired.

"Nothing. Rifles, forty-fives, M-sixties, grenade launchers—all accounted for."

"At least we don't have a black market ring dealing in stolen military weapons," Lansing commented.

He turned to the man in civvies. "You're the unit armorer?"

"Yes, sir," the youth nodded nervously, "Spec-four Dubois, sir."

"You're in charge of this arms room and responsible for it and the arms room keys while you're on duty. When did you last inventory these weapons?"

"Last night, sir. Over the weekend, the keys are issued to the Charge of Quarters NCO who happens to be on duty for that day. Sergeant Burns had CQ from last night until this morning. He and I inventoried the arms room Friday

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before he signed for the keys."

"Is that accurate, Sergeant?" Lansing asked.

"Yes, sir," Burns agreed. "But all the revolvers were here."

"That's what the inventory sheet states," Mulligan commented, "and no one signed for that thirty-eight last night according to the 'weapons out' form."

"Where are the revolvers stored?" Lansing inquired.

Dubois moved to a large steel wall-locker firmly chained to the gun racks. If anyone wanted to move the locker, he would have to break the chain or drag nearly two tons of metal with it. Dubois unlocked two padlocks and removed a steel retaining bar before the wall locker could be opened.

The locker was divided in half by a steel sheet. A number of M-60 machine guns and 203 grenade launchers were housed in the larger portion. Next to them were the shelves where the .38's and two boxes of ammunition were stored. Only eight revolvers remained.

"Shouldn't these shells be stored seperately from the guns?" Lansing inquired.

According to regulation, yes," Mulligan replied. "But we've been flooded with M-sixteen ammunition and HE grenade shells for the refamiliarization program we'll conduct later this month. As only flight officers are allowed to draw the thirty-eights, I thought it would be alright to put everything together as we're short on storage area."

"There are so few revolvers here, it doesn't seem likely one wouldn't notice a missing gun," Lansing commented as he closed the wall locker, "unless you didn't bother to check them."

"But we did . . ." Burns insisted.

"Before you speak, Sergeant," Lansing warned, "Let me remind you that sloppy inventory practice is good for an ass chewing, but it won't threaten you with a murder charge."

"I counted all nine of those guns before Dubois locked that thing up, sir," Burns declared firmly.

Lansing inspected the locker door hinges. The pins and screws had been welded, the metal fused into the steel frame. There were no scratches to indicate anyone had attempted to force the door. He examined the padlocks. Both were solid Master locks in good condition. He moved to the arms room entrance and inspected the door. It was quality corrugated steel, three inches thick.

Removing three padlocks was required to open the arms-room door. Two were quality Medeco security locks, the other a large, Abloy special-security padlock. Lansing, an advanced student of the art of lock picking, knew it would be almost impossible to pick or force all three of the padlocks. He failed to discover any evidence

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to suggest the locks had been forced.

"This isn't a cracker box," Lansing muttered as he checked the retaining pins and screws to the door hinges. He wasn't surprised to find they too had been welded.

"Nobody could get into this arms room without a ring of keys, sir," Dubois insisted.

Lansing was inclined to agree.

II

SPECIAL 5TH CLASS Wendy Davis placed a cup of coffee on Lansing's desk. As he looked up from a collage of file folders and reports to watch her walk across the office to her desk he smiled with appreciation. She'd be a good secretary if she only brightened up the place, but Wendy was more then decorative. She was a clerical marvel and a diligent worker. While he pondered the regrettable military rules about commissioned officers fraternizing with enlisted personnel, Major Conglose entered.

Conglose seemed to suffer from perpetual consternation. Lansing had never heard him laugh or tell a single joke. The only time Lansing could recall seeing Conglose smile was when he thought the captain was about to be demoted by General Clayton. Today, Conglose appeared even more ill tempered then usual. He was wearing his glasses, something he seldom did because he considered it unmasculine.

"This isn't a flophouse, Captain!" Conglose snarled, "You're wearing a Class-A dress green uniform. That poplin shirt should be buttoned at the throat and your tie tightened."

"Sorry, sir," Lansing replied. "It's been a long day."

"Davis!" Conglose snapped, "Don't you come to attention when a field grade officer enters the room?"

"It's been a long day for her too, Major," Lansing commented as Wendy swung her legs from under the desk and rose quickly.

"That's no excuse for sloppy military courtesy," Conglose growled as he turned back to Wendy. "That uniform is a disgrace. Don't you have skirts of a decent length, Specialist? This is an Army base, not a chorus line."

"Some regulations can stand to be overlooked," Lansing said.

"You're suppose to be investigating a homicide . . ."

"That's exactly what we *are* doing, sir," Lansing replied firmly. "Wendy and I spent most of yesterday and all of this morning collecting 201 personnel files from Ansbach and investigative reports from the Narcotics Division in Fuerth."

"Why is this taking so long, Captain?"

"Because this is the weekend, sir," Lansing snapped back. "Even you should be aware that

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this data is difficult to aquire even on weekdays and examining it is long, tedious work, sir!"

"Just because you think you'll have the rank of major next month doesn't give you the right to be insubordinate, Lansing!"

"*Wendy!*" Lansing said. "Take a half-hour break and shut the door behind you."

She eagerly obeyed. Alone with Conglose, Lansing asked, "What the hell is the matter with you?"

"This homicide investigation concerns me. Major Hansen helped me to transfer from S-One in Frankfort to CID."

"I'll try to find his killer anyway, major," Lansing told him.

"Hansen was one of my closest friends," Conglose explained more quietly.

"I'm sorry, sir," Lansing nearly whispered. "All right," he leaned back. "The Nuremburg Police report isn't much help. Ballistics confirm that the thirty-eight-caliber revolver was the murder weapon. No fingerprints were found. Major Hansen lived in an apartment near where he was killed. He was probably going home.

"However, there was one interesting item. A small packet was discovered in a secret pouch in Hansen's jacket lining. It contained a little more than an ounce of heroin. According to the report, it's high quality stuff, refined by professionals."

"Do you mean the Mafia is involved?" Conglose's mouth fell open.

"Not very likely. Most of the big narcotics trade in Central Europe is handled by the *Union de Corse*, the Corsican syndicate," Lansing explained. "Hansen was investigating a heroin ring with connections at Munson Barracks.

"He had a number of suspects, individuals who have an additonal source of income beyond their monthly Army pay. Some of these suspects may be selling cigarettes on the black market, stealing from their fellow soldiers. They may even have a job off base on the weekends. But one of them."

—Lansing indicated the files on his desk— "one of these men, got the gun."

Sergeant Donald Burns kissed the gorgeous blonde in front of Munson Barracks entrance. He gave her a fistful of bills and urged her to have a good time. She was at least ten years younger then the thirty-seven-year old NCO, but her upturned nose and expensive clothing hinted that her social level was well above middle-class. As she climbed into a waiting taxi, Lansing tried to guess how much she paid every month to have platinum hair.

"Had to tell her you're restricted to the base until my investigation is over?" the CID officer asked as Burns walked back from the gate.

"Yes, sir." the sergeant saluted sourly.

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"That's quite a woman, Sergeant."

"Have you been following me all day, Captain?" Burns growled.

"Not quite," Lansing told him. "But I've been reading about you all morning." He walked beside the wiry NCO as he spoke. "Sad story in your 201 file. Here you are, ten years in the service and still just a buck sergeant. Plain old E-5, three stripes and a lot of hash marks . . ."

"I know what I am, sir."

"And you know why, too. Every time you got in trouble, be it an Article 15 or that Summary Court Martial in '75, it seems there was always a woman involved."

"There are worse vices, sir."

"Yeah, like heroin," Lansing growled.

"What's that suppose to mean?" Burns's eyes opened wide.

"It means you're a bottom-of-the-totem-pole non-com and you have a woman with expensive written all over her. How do you afford her, Sergeant?" Lansing asked. "And don't give me any crap that it's your personality."

"What does she have to do with . . . ?" Burns's mouth fell open, "You think I've been selling dope?"

"Major Hansen thought you might be. You remember him. He called himself Jerry Shore when he sold insurance on this base. Somebody shot him to death with that thirty-eight you couldn't find yesterday morning."

"I didn't know that bearded salesman was CID!"

Lansing sighed. "Sergeant, one of the reasons I always wear a uniform, although I'm a CID investigator, is that an experienced crook can see through disguises if an undercover man is around him long enough."

"I was on CQ duty when Hansen or Shore or whoever he was bought it. How can you suspect me?"

"You couldn't have pulled the trigger, but you could have got the gun. Maybe you passed it to your girlfriend and she gave it to the person who did the killing. That would make you an accessory to first-degree murder. According to the UCMJ, you'd be just as guilty as the man who pumped three slugs into Major Hansen."

"I'm innocent," Burns snarled through clenched teeth, "And you can't prove a damned thing, Captain."

"Give me time, Sergeant." Lansing smiled thinly.

Lansing entered Munson Barracks' Headquarters Battery building and asked the SP5 by the CQ desk if First Lieutenant Theodore Carstairs was in his office. The CQ led Lansing to an office across the hall from HQ. Battery's orderly room. A sign labeled XO was nailed to its door.

Knocking lightly, Lansing opened the door to discover a tall lean figure in fatigue uniform sitting

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behind a desk with his booted feet propped up in front of him. Although the black bar on his collar revealed he was an advanced lieutenant, the face above it ressembled a teenager's. The officer with a kid's features held a telephone receiver to the side of his head.

"*Moi mout s'en aller, mon frere. Adieu.*" he said rapidly into the mouthpiece and swung the receiver into the phone cradle. "What can I help you with, sir?" he asked.

Lansing introduced himself.

"Yeah! I think I read something about you in 'The Overseas Weekly' or 'The Stars and Stripes'," Carstairs began, his face appearing younger with each word. "You solved that murder case a couple of months ago over at Bradford Barracks, right?"

"I'm surprised you remember," Lansing commented, "Almost as surprised as I was to discover a member of the Carstairs family of Philadelphia was stationed here."

"Hey, Captain. The Carstairs are still a long way from the Kennedys or the Rockefellers." The lieutenant winked and grinned. "But you didn't come here to talk about my family. You must be investigating that murder that happened downtown."

"Right again, Lieutenant."

"But why do you want to see me about a gun somebody swiped from Alpha Battery? I haven't been attached to that outfit since my gold bar turned silver." He glanced down at his collar and added, "or black with fatigues."

"You used to be A Battery's supply officer. I noticed the supply section is in the basement, not far from the arms room. You must know that arms room pretty well."

"Their unit armorer knows it better then I do."

"Did you ever handle the key ring to the arms room?"

"Sure. Dubois was my supply driver as well as the armorer. Whenever I needed to send the truck out to pick up TA50 gear or turn in equipment to be repaired, either I or the supply NCO had to hold onto the keys. After all, those keys can't be off post—they're the only set. If an emergency called for drawing weapons, A Battery would be in a helluva fix without those keys. But I haven't even seen those arms-room keys for over two months."

"But you *have* visited Alpha Battery on a regular basis?"

"Well, I'm the executive officer for Headquarters Battery now. An HQ Battery is an odd outfit. A regular captain runs the unit functions, just like any other battery, but the Post commander and his entire staff are assigned to our unit, too.

"We've got a brigadier general, a full bird colonel, a couple lieutenant colonels and a bunch of majors in the 'headshed' across the street. No captain is going to tell them what to do, but the

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battery commander has to see to the needs of all those field grades.

"So, the BC gives a lot of that work to me. I've got to check with other batteries—especially their supply sections—to get the best TA50, office paraphenalia, tents and so forth, to keep that collection of senior officers off our ass."

"Is that what you were doing at A Battery Friday night at 2200 hours?" Lansing inquired.

"Twenty-two hundred? Around eight o'clock . . ." Carstairs looked up at the ceiling.

"Sergeant Burns, the assistant CQ and several EM's have stated in writing that you were there at that time."

"Oh, I don't deny it, sir." Carstairs shrugged. "Unless Burns says he gave me the damn arms-room keys. The new supply officer for A Battery, Lieutenant O'Keefe, is a good friend of mine. He and I were going to shoot the breeze in his office and probably go out on the town, you know." He winked again.

"But you were alone when you left. Didn't O'Keefe show up?"

"Well, he told me he might not be able to make it." Carstairs shrugged. "He's married, if you get the picture. Anyway, I hung around in the basement by his office for about twenty minutes and took off by my lonesome."

"Did anyone see you down there?"

"Hell, no. It was Friday night, Captain. Nobody was working except the CQ and the guys on guard duty—and they don't patrol the basements. Like I said, Burns didn't give me those keys. Why don't your check with O'Keefe?"

"I will," Lansing assured him, "But he's not a suspect. Major Hansen, known to you as Jerry Shore, was investigating your activities."

"Aw, Christ," the lieutenant growled. "That redneck . . ." He looked up. "Hey, he wasn't a buddy of yours was he, Captain?"

"I hardly knew him."

"Well, I kinda figured he was CID all along. He was real nosy about a project I've been involved with lately. We all know there's a drug problem in the Army, right? Well, I've been getting a few of the enlisted men to meet with me in rap sessions once a week. They're into hashish, uppers, downers, coke, speed, that sort of stuff. I'm trying to help them get their heads together, you know." Carstairs sighed. "But Shore was the type who only wants to toss the poor dumb bastards in jail, instead of try to help them."

"Hansen was trying to uncover a heroin ring. Do you know anything about that?"

"Heroin? No way! I don't know anything about any 'horse' around here. That's a bum trip."

"What qualifications do you have to help these kids with their drug dependence?"

"Plain old human compassion. Besides, I've tried most of the

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light stuff myself before I joined the Green Machine." Carstairs shrugged, "Hell, you were in Vietnam. Don't tell me you never puffed a loco weed."

"I wasn't having a pot party in Nam," Lansing replied. "I was fighting a war. I don't know what the politicians and the diplomats want to call it now. *We* called it a war." He cocked his head slightly, "I notice you rent a house off post in the *Grun Aker* district. That's one of the best suburbs in Nuremburg. Most generals don't live that well."

"So, how do I manage with just a first lieuy salary?" Carstairs guessed Lansing's next question. "Money from home. Mommy and daddy send these other dogfaces twenty dollars for Christmas. My mommy and daddy send me a hundred bucks a week."

"Why'd you join the Army, Lieutenant?"

"I thought I wanted to be independent." He shook his head. "I was wrong."

"Yeah." Lansing muttered, "I suppose mommy and daddy paid for a fine, expensive education for you: Including French lessons."

"Sure did." He tilted his head toward the telephone, "I was talking to my girl friend. She's French." He winked once more, "In more ways then one."

"Is she a Corsican, by any chance?"

"Naw. She says she's from Paris. Why?"

"Curiosity." Lansing replied, "We rednecks are like that."

III

SERGEANT FIRST Class Doyle was an MP. He was also considered to be the most knowledgeable authority on burglar tactics in USAEUR. He had learned the hard way. Doyle had used his 'breaking and entering' for careers on both sides of the law.

Doyle grunted as he turned a slender pick crammed into the keyhole of a padlock. A dull click rewarded his efforts and he pulled the lock open. Doyle removed it from the arms room and placed it beside the other Medeco lock on the floor. Gripping the big steel Abloy padlock, Doyle cursed under his breath.

"That's enough, Sarge," Lansing told him as he glanced at his wrist watch. "Just opening those two locks has taken more then twenty minutes."

"These ultra-security locks are a real bitch, sir." Doyle stated, looking up at the captain. Although he weighed nearly two hundred pounds, most of it due to his bulging belly, Doyle was only four inches over five feet tall. Lansing was nearly a foot taller than the SFC burglar expert.

"Do you think someone could possibly unlock all three padlocks, enter the arms room, remove two more locks from a wall locker and relock everything in less then

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thirty minutes?"

"Thirty minutes?" Doyle whistled, "I've always believed nothing is impossible, sir. But that's gotta come damn close to it. I might have to spend that much time just to get that Abloy open."

"What if the person was familiar with the locks and the keys?"

"That would help some, sure." Doyle nodded. "But even if he knew the locks and the keys and was a professional locksmith, I'd be surprised if he could manage all that in less then an hour. After all, those padlocks would have to be repicked in order to lock them back into place. If somebody has done what you're suggesting, sir, I should be taking lessons from him."

"Thanks, Sarge," Lansing said as he turned to see Dubois, the unit armorer of A Battery, descended the stairs with another soldier.

"Let me try that again," the man with Dubois urged.

"Sure, pick one," the armorer held a deck of cards, spread out like a fan.

"Okay," his companion announced, selecting a card from the deck.

"Did you look at it?" Dubois asked, his eyes closed and his head turned away from the other trooper.

"Yeah."

"Then put it in the deck and shuffle the cards yourself."

Dubois' companion obliged and returned the deck to the armour. Spreading the cards as a fan once again, Dubois inspected their faces and drew one from the deck. "I can't find it here."

His companion frowned with disappointment.

"Because it's right here!" Dubois reached up to his friend's ear and apparently plucked a three of hearts from thin air.

"Wow! How'd you do *that*?" the other soldier exclaimed.

"I didn't know you were so fond of amateur magic acts, Captain," Doyle commented, noticing Lansing's interest in the armorer and his companion.

"I'm going to be here for some time, Sarge," Lansing told him. "You go on back to CID headquarters. Thanks again."

"Sure thing," Doyle replied as he gathered up his lock picks, "Let me know how the case turns out."

Dubois approached the arms room. His eyes opened wide with surprise as he saw Lansing. "Oh! Hello, sir." A quiver flavored his voice.

"Hello, Specialist." Lansing smiled. "Your conjuring tricks are very good."

"Uh . . . thank you, sir," Dubois replied, glancing over his shoulder at his companion as he vanished into the supply office.

"It's almost 1630 hours." Lansing commented, "I suppose you're here to open the arms room so the men assigned to guard duty

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may draw their weapons."

"That's right, sir." Dubois nodded.

"I'll try not to get in your way," Lansing assured him as the armorer removed the big keyring from his belt. "Oh, my friend removed those two padlocks on the floor. He's sort of a locksmith for CID."

"But the regulations require anyone who opens this door has to sign an entrance form."

"He only unlocked it halfway, Specialist," Lansing replied. "I'll sign it. I'll accept the responsibility. Okay?"

The armorer nodded nerviously. Lansing noticed Dubois' hands trembled as he unlocked the remaining security padlock. The armorer entered and quickly stationed himself behind a small metal desk. Lansing leaned against the doorway as he explained that he wanted to watch the arms room S.O.P. (standard operational procedure). Dubois wasn't coversational. He avoided looking up at the CID captain and drummed his fingers on the desktop as they waited.

At 1638 hours, the troops of A. Battery assigned to guard duty arrived. Each enlisted man was required to produce a weapon card. Dubois checked the number issued to each a rifle with a wall chart and unlocked the necessary gun racks to draw the weapons.

The EMs wrote their signatures on an arms room form. Dubois filled in information concerning weapon unit numbers, serial numbers, time the M16 was issued and how many rounds were drawn. An NCO signed for a Colt M1911 pistol with two magazines and a small amount of ammunition, including two dozen 5.56 millimeter rounds for the entire guard force."

Dubois opened and relocked the gun racks as the demand for weapons arrived. Lansing noticed nothing irregular about the armorer's S.O.P., though Dubois was obviously uncomfortable in the presence of the CID officer. At 1700 hours, a young buck sergeant named Peters entered.

"I've got CQ tonight, Dubois. Let's count these pea-shooters," Peters announced, glancing at Lansing with surprise as the captain strolled into the arms room.

"Don't let me stop you, sergeant," the CID investigator urged.

Dubois and Peters conducted a careful tally of all rifle and pistol racks, checking the empty slots with the arms room forms. They inspected the ammunition cases and the padlocks securing the weapons.

Dubois removed the Master locks and steel bar from the wall locker. He and Peters counted the remaining .38 revolvers on the shelves and turned to the larger section of the locker to inspect the M-60s and grenade launchers.

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Satisfied, Peters told Dubois to lock it.

"Not yet," Lansing declared as they shut the locker doors.

He then reached into his field jacket and drew a .38 caliber revolver. He handed it to Dubois, butt first.

"I removed it while you were both busy counting the machine-guns," Lansing explained. "And I'm not even a magician."

Alvin Dubois lived in a four-man room in the barracks. Two of his roommates were present when the armorer and Captain Lansing entered. Politely, Lansing asked that he be able to talk to Dubois privately. He produced a CID identification card and the roommates were eager to oblige.

"All right, Specialist," Lansing began. "You have a right to refuse to comply with my requests, as I have no official jurisdiction in this billet. However, all I need do is contact Captain Mulligan downstairs and inform him that this involves my investigation.

"If your BC. attempts to interfere, he'll risk the wrath of my Commanding Officer, General Clayton. It's unlikely Mulligan will forbid me from questioning you and searching your room, in fact, he'll probably wish to assist me. That can only make matters worse for you."

"What do you want?" Dubois asked. He sounded miserable.

"Answers," Lansing replied. Glancing around the room, he said, "Not bad for an army barracks—carpet, stereo, television set." He turned to face Dubois, "Are they all yours?"

"I bought everything in the PX." the armorer declared.

"Which one is yours?" Lansing asked, tilting a thumb toward the wall lockers located beside the bunk beds.

"That one." Dubois pointed. "Please open it for me."

Dubois bit his lower lip nervously, but granted the captain's request. Lansing raised his eyebrows as he looked inside. "You have a very orderly wall locker, Specialist." Lansing grinned. "It's much better than I used to keep as an EM."

Dubois's uniforms were neatly hung according to USAEUR regulation. His dress greens, khakis and fatigues were properly placed with the unit crest on the left shoulder outward. Civilian clothing was also neatly hung with the uniforms. Lansing removed a suit from the locker.

"Very nice." Lansing mused, "And some of these shirts appear to be silk. Steroes, TV sets, expensive thick carpets. You seem to be doing pretty well, Specialist."

"I don't drink or smoke much. I save my money so I can buy good merchandise."

"Well, I understand that you manage to save quite a bit despite your expensive tastes. I talked to Captain Mulligan about you

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earlier today and he said you put aside one hundred dollars a month. He said you put the money in the orderly room safe right after each pay day. Now, I know spec-fours make more money than I used to as an E-four—the Army still had corporals back then—, but that's still a lot of cash."

Dubois didn't comment. Lansing returned the suit to the wall locker and noticed something behind the military headgear on the top shelf. Reaching up, behind Dubois's "flying saucer" service cap, Lansing discovered a large bottle of brandy. "Don't drink much, eh?"

"I didn't say I don't drink at all . . ."

"*Eau-de-vie.*" Lansing read the label on the bottle, "Imported from France." He returned the brandy to the shelf. "Dubois—that's a French name, isn't it? If I remember your 201 file correctly, you were born and raised in the French Quarter of New Orleans."

Dubois nodded.

"And you speak French fluently."

"I was brought up with two languages," Dubois explained.

"I see," Lansing said. "Have you ever been to France? Do you have any French friends in Nuremburg? Corsican friends, perhaps?"

"No . . ." Dubois gulped loudly, "What are you asking me these questions for?"

"You were being investigated by Major Hansen. He suspected you had an additional source of income beside your monthly pay from Uncle Sugar. I don't imagine anyone would gamble with you, not the way you can handle a deck of cards. What is it then, Dubois? Are you dealing a little black market, Specialist?"

"No, sir!" The armorer's eyes bulged in their sockets.

"A magician could handle a simple sleight-of-hand trick, as I did in the arms room, with ease. While Burns was checking the machine-guns you could have stolen that thirty-eight and locked up the arms room without anyone being the wiser."

"But I didn't."

"Where'd you go Saturday night?"

"Into Nuremburg."

"Where?"

"I went to a tavern."

"A tavern?" Lansing raised his eyebrows, "You keep expensive French brandy in your locker and you hang around in bars when you're off duty. I thought you didn't drink much, Specialist."

"I wanted to get off the base," Dubois explained. "To get away from the damned Army . . ."

"Did you shoot Hansen, yourself, or just give the gun to one of your Corsican pals?"

"Neither," Dubois insisted, a cold sweat broke out on his forehead, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Maybe you don't," Lansing

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admitted, "Maybe you do."

IV

THE FOLLOWING morning, a Tuesday, Lansing entered his office at CID headquarters. He wasn't expecting a visitor, but Lieutenant Theodore Carstairs, handsomely clad in class-A dress-green uniform, was sitting in a straight back chair in front of Lansing's desk.

"Hi, Captain," the junior officer greeted him.

"This is a surprise," Lansing commented. "When I found my door unlocked, I assumed my secretary had arrived early. How'd you get in here, Lieutenant?"

"Don't tell me you still think I might be a master lock picker, Captain," Carstairs replied. "I heard about what you did yesterday bringing that 'breaking and entering' expert and timing him as he worked on those locks. Come on, Captain. There's nothing in my 201 file about locksmithing . . ."

"Will you please answer my question, Lieutenant?"

"Sure, Captain." Carstairs shrugged. "A janitor let me in. He's a little guy with a greasy black moustache—looks like an Arab or a Turk or some kind of wog."

"He's Greek," Lansing explained, tossing his hat onto his desk.

"That's pretty close." Carstairs winked.

"What brings you to my turf?" Lansing asked, combing his short, slightly gray, brown hair lightly with his fingers.

"I came across a little information that might help you with your case. Interested?"

"I might be."

"As I told you, sir," Carstairs began, rising and slowly pacing around the room. "I've been trying to help some our hash-smoking EM's kick the habit. Anyway, I've discovered, through my pothead contacts, that the main dealer on Munson Barracks is a spic named Gonzales."

"Yeah." Lansing grimaced. "Jesus Emmanuel Gonzales, Private First Class. I've read his 201."

"Then you know he's bad news," Carstairs stated. "And he's attached to Alpha Battery."

"So, you think he's the killer?"

"Hey, Captain! You're the detective, sir." Carstairs held his hands open wide. "But I'd say he's one helluva a good suspect. My sources tell me he's a ruthless little bastard. Gonzales has supposedly pulled a knife on users who were late with their payments and I hear he's had more then one dude worked over. Sometimes his victims get cut up a little, but he hasn't maimed or killed anybody . . ." Carstairs shook his head. "At least, nobody has *proved* that he's snuffed anybody—yet."

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"Thanks for the tip," Lansing aid.

"Sure, Captain," the lieutenant eplied as he moved to the door. By the way, I finally figured out hy you asked me if my girlfriend s a Corsican. Those frogs run the eroin traffic in this part of urope, right?"

"You know," Lansing smiled hinly, "for a part-time social vorker from a rich, liberal family, ou seem to use a lot of ethnic lurs."

"I don't see any reason to espect a goddam pusher, sir. I lon't worry about *what* terms I se." Carstairs reached for the loorknob. "But, you could be ollowing the wrong angle, Captain. Your killer doesn't have o speak French. Surely, the Corsicans have members who understand English" —he opened the door to depart—"*or* Spanish."

PFC Jesus Emmanuel Gonzales was preparing creamed beef for the famous Army delicacy, nicknamed S.O.S. The mess sergeant tapped him on the shoulder and told Gonzales the captain sitting in the corner of the dining hall wanted to talk to him. Gonzales wiped his hands on his slightly grubby cook's white uniform and walked to Lansing's table.

"Have a seat," the CID investigator invited as he finished his breakfast of sausage and eggs.

"You want to see me, sir?" the olive-skinned Puerto Rican inquired as he sank into the offered chair.

"That's right," Lansing admitted as he sipped his coffee. "I've read your 201 file. You've been arrested three times for possession of harmful drugs. Charges were dropped once, an Article 15 chopped your E-4 rank to PFC and the third led to a Special Court Martial."

"Yeah," Gonzales shrugged. "But that Court Martial found me innocent, sir." His accent on the word 'sir' was almost a sneer.

"The trial was terminated due to insufficient evidence, as I recall," Lansing corrected. "A couple of the soldiers who were going to testify against you suddenly changed their stories."

"That ain't my fault."

"Isn't it?"

"You don't look like no narc."

"I'm not." Lansing placed his empty cup on the table. "I'm a homicide investigator. The man you knew as Jerry Shore, the insurance salesman—he was a narc. His real name was Major Hansen, CID."

"I heard about it." Gonzales shrugged. "He got wasted a couple of days ago. So what? I ain't done nothing for you to be on my back."

"I hear you're a pusher, Gonzales," Lansing replied. "I used to be a police detective in Detroit. I learned to really hate pushers."

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"Hell!" Gonzales muttered. "The Army always tries to blame everything on a Soul Brother or a *Latino.*"

"Save that garbage for the next Human Relations conference." Lansing snorted. "You know as well as I do that the Army's Equal Opportunity Program gives minority groups a better chance for advancement then most civilian counterparts will offer."

Gonzales growled an obscenity.

"Yeah, same to you," Lansing retorted. "Do you just peddle hashish and cocaine, or have you graduated to heroin this year.?"

"Heroin? There ain't no 'H' in Germany, man."

"Like hell there isn't! Are any of your junkie customers former locksmiths by any chance?"

"Locksmiths?"

"The type that could pick open the arms-room door and steal a thirty-eight caliber revolver."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Jack."

"I'm talking about murder," Lansing replied coldly. "And if I get to nail a murderer who also deals dope to fellow American soldiers I'm going to be very happy *amigo.*"

Major Conglose paced angrilly in Lansing's office. SP5 Wendy Davis tried to ignore him as she typed the address of the Adjutant General's office in Berlin to a letter requesting information concerning new Uniform Code o Military Justice revisions tha might pertain to CID investiga tions. Lansing sat behind his desk leafing through a French/Englis dictionary.

"What are you bothering wit that thing for?" Conglose snap ped, "It's obvious that either th drug pusher or the armorer is th killer."

"Either of them could be, Lansing commented, looking u from the bilingual dictionary "But even if we dismiss the othe two suspects, I can't just dra Gonzales and Dubois in and wor them over with a rubber hose unt one of them confesses."

"Who do you think did it?"

"What matters isn't what think—it's what I can prove."

"Well, you proved how Duboi could have smuggled the gun ou of the arms room."

"What he could have done an what he did are not the sam thing." Lansing leaned back, hi hands forming a cradle for th back of his head.

"Couldn't Sergeant Burns have stolen the gun the same way?" Wendy asked.

"Burns isn't a magician," Conglose growled.

"Neither am I," Lansing reminded him. "And there is tha expensive lady friend of his."

"What about *her?*"

"I didn't hear her speak Perhaps she's French."

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"That's *right!*" Wendy exclaimed. "The Corsican connection doesn't have to be a man. A woman may have even killed Major Hansen."

"This conversation is becoming absurd," Conglose growled. "Burns wouldn't need to sneak the thirty-eight out of the wall locker in front of a witness. He had the keys. As for the sex of the person who actually pulled the trigger, I fail to see that that matters."

"*Everything* has to be considered, Major," Lansing said calmly. "One never knows what theory or clue might be the key to a homicide case."

"Well, you won't find any clues here. After you spoke with Gonzales, what did you do?"

"Oh, I spent most of the day on Munson Barracks trying to track down Spec-Four Charles Wagner," Lansing answered.

"Another suspect?"

"No. He's the unit mail clerk at Alpha Battery. Normally, he'd be an easy man to find, but Wagner's E.T.S. is coming up later this month. I finally discovered he went to Ansbach to have his personnel files cleared. That 'end term of service' business can take quite a while.

"This isn't the only homicide case I'm investigating and I had work to do here." Lansing tapped his forefinger on his desk. "So, I decided I'd waited for Wagner long enough and I asked Captain Mulligan to tell him to call me when he finally returned."

"It's almost 1900 hours." the major declared, glancing at his watch, "How long are you going to wait this time?"

"Here in my office?" Lansing said. "Until he calls."

"Well, I'm not waiting around here all night," Conglose snapped. "And I don't think General Clayton will approve of your sitting on your butt to conduct an investigation of the murder of one of his men." Conglose stomped up to the door. "You can be sure I'll give him a complete report concerning your inefficiency in the morning!"

He slammed the door as he left.

"That's why you'll never be a good investigator, Major," Lansing commented softly, "No patience."

V

SPEAKING INTO the telephone receiver, Captain Lansing assured SP4 Wagner that he understood why the EM was late in calling. Wagner had met some friends from his Basic Combat Training unit while in Ansbach. They had gone to a movie, had a few drinks, et cetera.

Lansing resisted the urge to tell Wagner just to shut up and slam

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the phone into its cradle. Instead, he thanked Wagner for the information and wished him luck with whatever new career the mail clerk might find on the 'outside'.

"Boy, does that guy like to talk!" Lansing sighed as he finally hung up. He glanced at his wristwatch—2214 hours, almost a quarter after ten PM.

Wendy Davis had agreed to stay late. She had completed all the filing and form preparation she could find. She was doing little but manning the coffeemaker by the time Lansing's call arrived.

"Good news?" Wendy asked.

"Yes." Lansing smiled, "I'm glad you're here. There's a lot that needs to be done . . ."

He broke off as his office door opened. He rose from his desk to see a tall thick-chested man dressed in a military policeman's uniform. As the CID headquarters was located in the same building with an MP division, seeing an Army cop wasn't unusual. This MP, however, held a pistol with a foot-long sound suppressor screwed into its muzzle.

"*Oh!*" Wendy gasped.

"Do not scream," the phony cop said. His vowels were accented with a nasal quality, revealing English was not his native tongue.

Wendy was silent. Lansing raised his hands slowly.

"Over there." The intruder indicated the chair in front of Lansing's desk with a wave of his weapon.

As Wendy followed his instructions, Lansing stepped closer to the gunman. "You're too late, fella," the captain announced, his hands still held at shoulder level. "You'd be wise to leave while you can still flee the country."

Lansing shuffled closer. The silenced pistol jerked forward, its muzzle aimed at Lansing's chest.

"Come no closer," the gunman warned.

"There's a raid being conducted at this very moment," Lansing lied, hoping to distract the false MP as he stalled for time. "Your friends are being arrested."

"A raid?" the gunman asked suspiciously, his thick lips frowned and his dark, liquid eyes shifted in their sockets.

Suddenly he grinned. His gaze had fallen on Wendy, who sat in the chair stiffly. The hemline of her WAC uniform had risen about four inches above her knees. She tugged her skirt down, embarrassed by his feasting orbs.

The killer clucked his tongue with regret as his eyes turned to Lansing. The direction of the weapon hadn't swayed from its target. Having recovered from the immediate surprise of the gunman's entry, Lansing noticed the weapon wasn't a .45 issued to MPs.

It was a slightly smaller auto-

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loading pistol which only appeared to be an elephant gun because of the sound suppressor. Lansing wondered if he could live long enough with a couple of slugs from the handgun in his chest, to take the triggerman with his hands. Not likely.

"The raid is being launched against your fellow Corsicans." Lansing returned to his fabricated tale. "Your headquarters in Nuremburg is being taken apart," he added, hoping the gunman was a Corsican and that the gangsters had some sort of headquarters in the city.

"You are lying, *monsieur.*" The killer frowned again.

Lansing glanced at Wendy via the corner of an eye. Her hands were in her lap, the fingers moving. Surreptitiously, she hiked up her skirt.

Turning to the gunman, Lansing said, "What if I'm telling the truth? Can you take the risk?"

"*Oui,*" the killer stated flatly. He raised the pistol to aim more accurately.

"Aw, don't shoot us," Wendy purred seductively.

The Corsican's eyes barely moved in her direction, but his attention increased instantly. She was smiling broadly as she leaned back in the chair. Her skirt was bunched up high on her thighs as she slowly crossed her well-revealed, nylon-encased legs.

He'd never be more distracted, Lansing thought as he lunged forward. Before the gunman could react, Lansing's left hand slapped the silenced muzzle of the pistol downward and his right hand executed a karate 'spearhand' stroke. Silencers aren't as effective in reality as they are in the movies. The pistol popped loudly as the killer pulled the trigger by reflex action. A nine-millimeter slug slammed into the floor at the same moment Lansing hit his opponent.

It was a life-or-death struggle. The CID captain couldn't afford to be gentle. He drove the tips of his stiffened fingers into the Corsican's throat as hard as he could. An ugly sound escaped from the gunman's crushed windpipe. Lansing twisted the pistol from the man's grasp as the Corsican sank to the floor, his left hand clawing at his throat in vain. He convulsed for a moment and lay still.

Wendy had jumped from her chair, watching with horror and curiosity. She opened her mouth, but Lansing held a finger to his lips and she remained silent. To Wendy's surprise, Lansing purposely pointed the gun at the floor and fired another shot into the floor. Still motioning for her to be quiet, Lansing led her from the office, closing the door behind them.

"We have to call some people,

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but we can't use the phone in the office," he explained as he quickly examined the confiscated gun. It was a French MAB pistol.

"But what about that man you knocked out?"

"He's not unconscious," Lansing told her. "He's dead."

Warrant Officer Melvin Scott, attached to the Special Equipment Department of the CID, was in his apartment with his wife and two youngest children when the phone rang. He quickly agreed to Lansing's request and rushed from the USAEUR housing district to CID headquarters.

Major Conglose didn't arrive until Scott had already entered Lansing's office. To Conglose's astonishment, Lansing was wearing a web belt with a Government Issue .45 Colt holstered on his hip. The captain handed a similar rig to Conglose.

"I drew this from the arms room for you," Lansing announced. "Don't lose it. The pistol is signed in my name."

"What the devil is going on?" the major demanded.

The six-foot-four, black WO emerged from Lansing's office, the frequency modulation detector he operated better then any man in Europe, tucked under one thick arm.

"You were right, Captain," Scott said. "I found it screwed into the bottom of your desk."

"Found what?" Conglose asked.

"A listening device, sir," the warrant officer replied. "A small but powerful wireless microphone, with a range of roughly one mile."

"Somebody bugged your office?" the major turned to Lansing, his face a mask of confusion.

"That's right, sir," Lansing answered. "And somebody else tried to kill me. Now, if you'd care to buckle on that gun, we can go pay someone a visit."

"Who?" Conglose inquired as he wrapped the web belt around his waist.

"As Major Hansen was a friend of yours, I thought you'd like to be present when his killer is arrested," Lansing told him.

VI

LESS THAN HALF an hour later, Lansing, Conglose and four military policemen armed with M-3 submachine guns stormed a house in the *Grun Aker* district of Nuremburg. The MPs and the extra fire-power were a precaution in case any Corsican gangsters were present. First Lieutenant Theodore Carstairs, however, was alone. Lansing informed him he was under arrest.

"Are you crazy?" Carstairs asked, still shaken by the unexpected invasion.

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"Hardly," Lansing said dryly. "Major? Perhaps you'd like to put the cuffs on him."

"Thanks, Lansing." Conglose nodded and produced a set of stainless steel handcuffs.

"Like all criminals when they get caught, you're probably wondering what you did wrong," Lansing began. "You first mistake was when I overheard your conversation with your French girlfriend. You should have just hung up instead of explaining why.

"My French is pretty lousy, but I did catch one term from your conversation—*Mon frere,* 'my brother'. That's a strange title for a sweetheart, even if you were gay." He turned to Conglose. "I looked it up in the dictionary to be sure I was right."

Lansing sat down in a large leather armchair and continued, "Of course, that one slip wasn't enough to prove you a murderer. Luckily, you supplied me with many other mistakes. Your explanation for how you could afford this big fancy house was another error.

"Your 'Mommy and Daddy' supposedly send you one hundred dollars a week, but Specialist Wagner told me you never received a single letter from your parents the entire time you were assigned to Alpha Battery. No letters, no money from home.

"Now, that proved that you had an additional income besides your Army pay. It did not prove that you were a killer. All the suspects involved have some kind of additional—probably illegal—source of money. That made this case more difficult as no one would tell me the truth as they were all afraid of getting in hot water for their own activities.

"What they weren't aware of is—I don't give a damn what they're doing. I'm a homicide investigator. If someone is dealing black market, gambling, shaking down old widows and orphans, even selling drugs, it's not my problem—unless it pertains to my investigation.

"But your biggest mistake, Carstairs, was that you took too many precautions. You tried to cover all the bases and in so doing, you exposed yourself. You popped up in my office this morning to give me that 'hot tip' about Gonzales. It was supposed to draw my attention away from you and to another suspect, right?"

Carstairs remained silent.

"What's ironic is we were developing a strong case against Dubois when you offered Gonzales for a scapegoat. Maybe if you hadn't come to my office this morning, we would have arrested Dubois and you might have gotten away with it—but I doubt it. Your tendency to overplay your hand would probably have tripped you

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up some other way.

"When the Corsican hitman entered my office, it put the lid on this case and branded you as the man I wanted. The killer arrived because I was going to talk to the mail clerk. I had, in fact, already spoken to Wagner before the gunman came, but I assume he or you or someone else had been listening to the conversations all day in my office, so you knew I was waiting for Wagner to call.

"Your friend dressed up in an MP uniform, which you may have bought in a PX or even in some of the better supplied pawnshops here in Nuremburg. He strolled inside without any trouble, following the instructions you gave him to get to my office. He attached his silencer in the hall and came in to blow me away. However, my secretary proved to be too much for him.

"No one but you would be worried if I talked to the mail clerk. It's stupidly obvious that when you were in my office you planted the bug. At the time, you did this as a precaution, just in case I was getting too close to discovering your guilt. Once I understood your character trait of trying to cover all the angles, everything became crystal clear.

"Major Hansen must have suspected your 'rap sessions' to 'help the poor bastards get their heads straight' were in reality a farce. You weren't interested in helping those kids, you were looking for the drug dependent dummies who would be most apt to go from smoking hash or snorting coke to shooting up. I suppose that made you some sort of perverted talent scout.

"When Hansen began to get too close, you decided to kill him. Instead of having him stabbed or clubbed or shot by a gun your Corsicans smuggled in from France or bought through the German black market, you overplayed your hand again by using the thirty-eight from A Battery's arms rooms.

"You thought you'd be home free if you could draw our attention to Alpha Battery. After all, you hadn't been attached to A Battery for months. The CQ and the armorer, because of their constant opportunity to handle the arms room keys, would instantly be suspected, and, of course, there was the notorious PFC Gonzales. You figured we'd be thrown off the trail for sure."

"But aren't you forgetting something, Lansing?" Conglose asked, stepping away from Carstairs. "How did he get into the arms room in the first place?"

"Once again, the lieutenant's tendency for taking too many precautions was his undoing," Lansing replied. "Carstairs has

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been a crook for some time. He was a crook when he was a second looey, supply officer in A Battery.

As a crook, he figured he might need a gun some day. He told me himself that he handled the arms room keys often as the supply officer.

"Of course, he didn't tell us that he also made clay imprints of the keys and his Corsican pals found a locksmith or a keymaker who didn't object to breaking the law by manufacturing a set of keys to fit the imprints. Thanks to this preparation, Carstairs was able to open the arms room, steal the revolver and close it up in less then twenty minutes. At least, we can tell Doyle his reputation isn't in danger after all.

"Lieutenant O'Keefe, the current supply officer at A Battery, probably talked too much to his friend, Carstairs. O'Keefe must have mentioned that the thirty-eights were stored with their ammunition due to lack of space. Carstairs knew exactly what to look for and where to find it."

Lansing rose slowly, added, "Who killed Hansen—you or a Corsican?"

"Gaston shot him," Carstairs admitted.

"Is he the clown who tried to waste me in my office?" Lansing inquired.

Carstairs nodded.

"Well, he's already paid his dues," the captain stated. "Now it's your turn."

"You don't know what it's like," Carstairs snapped. "Being wealthy all your life, accustomed to luxuries, and then to have your family disown you and be forced to try to live decently on a chicken-shit army salary. You don't know what it's *like.*"

"No, I *don't,*" Lansing agreed, "I don't know what spending the rest of my life behind bars is like either, but you're going to find out."

He studied Carstairs before the MP's hauled him out the door.

"Lansing," Conglose began awkwardly, "I know I gave you a hard time on this case . . ."

"Forget it, Major," Lansing replied. "But do me one favor—please, don't complain about Specialist Davis's uniforms any more."

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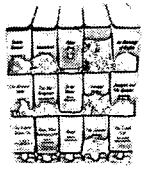

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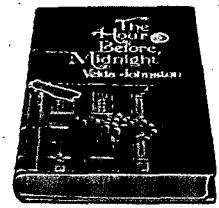

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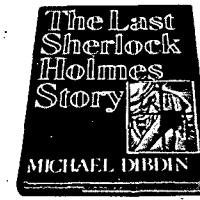

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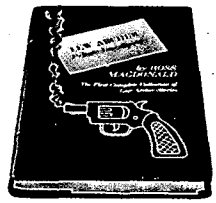

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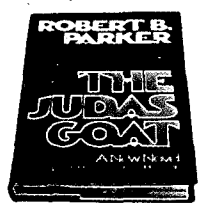

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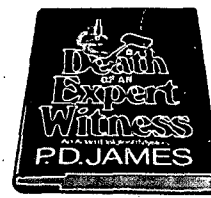

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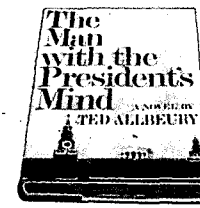

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